The practice of mental prayer

René de Maumigny, Elder Mullan

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THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL PRAYER

BY

FATHER RENÉ DE MAUMIGNY

of the Society of Jesus

FIRST TREATISE

Ordinary Prayer

Translated from the Fourth Edition with the Author's corrections and additions.

TRANSLATION REVISED BY

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PREFACE

THIS treatise is composed of five parts. Part I is devoted to showing the excellence of prayer in general.

Part II contains the principal acts of ordinary mental prayer. Here I have treated two points at length on account of their greater importance. The first point is prayer properly so called, or petition. This is indeed the unfailing means, ordained by Divine Providence, for obtaining all the graces of salvation and sanctity. Consequently nothing is more necessary in mental prayer than to know how to pray. The second point is charity or pure love of God. This is supremely important as the aim of mental prayer is a union with God of such intimate character that after it we live only for Him. Now such union can be brought about only by charity.

The subject of Part III is affective prayer in which acts of the will are appreciably more numerous than those of the understanding. Mention is also made here of the frequent raising of the heart to God during the day, the indispensable complement of the morning prayer and the only way to maintain the soul in the fulness of the supernatural life.

Part IV treats of the difficulties of mental prayer of which dryness of soul ranks first. It is the waterless desert which must of necessity be crossed in order to arrive at the promised land of intimacy with God. Unfortunately, many souls lose courage under this trial. I have endeavored to show how God can always be found by faith in His presence and entire conformity with His most Holy Will. Is not His Will, infinitely holy, adorable and worthy of being loved, always, even in times of desolation, the place of rest for us? Here we have the vital question in mental prayer, for it is only after we have learned to appreciate God's divine Will in the midst of interior suffering, that the foundation of the edifice is solid and capable of withstanding all winds.

Part V is confined to the study of the methods of prayer given in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. I am thus complying with the request of the religious who have asked me to undertake this work on prayer and who are much attached to St. Ignatius's excellent book.

And finally, throughout, I have tried to emphasize the supreme importance of solid virtue. I had even thought of devoting a series of chapters to it, but in the end I thought it perferable to reserve them for the treatise on extraordinary prayer, where illusions are more frequent and more dangerous.

I dedicate this humble work to Our Lady, Mother of all grace but especially of the gift of prayer which she imparted to the Holy Apostles in a marvellous way, by praying with them in the Cenacle (Acts 1: 14). By her intercession, may the readers of these pages gain a more perfect detachment from things transitory, a greater desire for what is eternal, and above all else such a burning love of God that they may no longer live but for His glory and the salvation of souls.

PRINCIPAL EDITIONS CITED

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CHAPTER I

EXCELLENCE OF PRAYER

PRAYER is intercourse with God, as unconstrained as that of children with their father, in which we speak with Him of what concerns His glory, His good pleasure and the interests of our soul.

Such is the idea of prayer given us by Jesus Christ Our Lord in answer to the Apostle's request that He should teach them to pray: Thus shall you pray: "Our Father who art in heaven." This answer shows that in meditation we are holding converse not only with the Creator and Sovereign Lord of all things, but still more as respectful, loving and beloved children with their Father.

Our Lord adds: "Hallowed by thy name! Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" By these words He shows that the subject of the conversation should be God's glory and His good pleasure, before all else.

He concludes with these words: "Give

us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." From which it is evident that the second subject of this conversation are our own interests, that is, our eternal happiness and the means of attaining it.

In conformity with the teaching of Our Divine Lord, St. Gregory of Nyssa says that prayer is a communing and conversation with God,[1] and St. Chrysostom, that it is a colloquy with God.[2]

Now if one remembers that on earth many subjects are received in public audience by their king but very few are admitted to his familiar intercourse, the excellence of prayer will easily be understood. It is not a reception by the Creator of the creatures in common with others, but an intimate conversation between God, the tenderest of Fathers, and His well beloved children. This is such a signal favor that reason could not conceive it; it had to be revealed to us by faith.

Isaias[3] represents the Seraphim covering their faces with their wings, to show

[1] *De orat. domin.*, cap. 1.
[2] *De orando Deo.* lib. 1, and *Homil.* 30 *in Gen.* [3] Is. 6: 2.

that they regard themselves as unworthy of holding intimate converse with God. Poor mortals that we are, we can, in spite of our misery, aspire to this marvellous grace. St. Paul says in his Epistle of the Galatians: "God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: 'Abba, Father!'"[1]

The same Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans writes: "You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: 'Abba, Father!'"[2] Now children may talk to their father simply and unconstrainedly.

Hence, nothing that the Fathers of the Church have said in their emphatic praise of prayer can astonish us.

"No practice is of greater importance, nothing we prize of more value in this life than prayer," writes St. Gregory of Nyssa.[3] "Think what happiness is granted to you, what glory is attached to the prayer in which we talk with God, in which we hold intercourse with Jesus Christ," says St. John Chrysostom.[4] One could not wish for grander praise, nor praise which would show more clearly the excellence of prayer.

[1] Galat. 4: 6.
[2] Rom. 8: 15.
[3] *De orat. domin.*
[4] *De orando Deo. l.* 2.

CHAPTER II

FIRST AND SECOND ADVANTAGES OF PRAYER: IT ENSURES OUR SALVATION AND ENRICHES US WITH NUMEROUS MERITS

It is an article of faith that prayer properly so called, or petition, made with the requisite conditions, obtains, without fail, salvation, for Our Lord has said: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asketh receiveth."[1] And again: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you."[2]

The required conditions are: Humility, confidence, and perseverance.

These three conditions may be fulfilled in vocal prayer, which is the ordinary means of salvation, but they are much more easily realized in meditation. In this, indeed, while reviewing the events of his life in God's presence and in bitterness of soul, the Christian vividly feels his own weak-

[1] Matth. 7: 7. [2] John 16: 23.

ness, and in profound humility cries: "Lord, Lord, hear my voice! Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication."[1]

Again, while meditating on Our Lord's words: "Ask and you shall receive; Amen, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you," the Christian makes an act of lively faith, in relying on the promise that God has made of giving us Heaven through the merits of Jesus Christ, and from this promise arises a firm hope of being heard in spite of natural fears, the attacks of the devil, and the allurements of the world.

Finally, while meditating under God's very eye and silencing all worldly pre-occupations, the Christian realizes that one thing alone is necessary, eternal salvation. Then, a heaven-sent light impresses upon him the truth of our Divine Master's maxim: "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?"[2]

And so, strengthened by these thoughts, he perseveres in prayer in spite of fear, listlessness or sadness, and in persevering he is saved.

[1] Ps. 129: 1. [2] Matth. 16: 26.

With regard to merit, prayer is a kind of holocaust by which he who prays offers himself without reserve as a victim to the divine Majesty.

In prayer an offering is made to God of the imagination, by restraining it from spreading itself on things profane; of the memory and intellect, by using them solely for what concerns God and His glory: of the will, by allowing it to interest itself only in the praise and service of God. Not even the senses and the members of the body are without their immolation. The eyes are consecrated to Him by keeping them modestly lowered; the ears, by closing them to all external sounds; the whole body, by keeping it in a respectful posture.

Prayer, then, is not a partial, but a total sacrifice, and is therefore meritorious in the extreme, especially in moments of dryness of spirit, when God hides Himself and when nature feels strongly impelled towards creatures.

In the second place, meditation is a source of merit on account of the interior acts which it causes us to make. These acts, indeed, are more perfect in themselves than exterior

good works, in accordance with Our Lord's words: "God is a spirit and they that adore Him, must adore Him in spirit and in truth."[1] Such acts include those of faith, hope, charity, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, petition and others, of which we shall treat at length later If our life is not in conformity with the acts made during prayer, truly we ought to fear that they are but imperfect, according to the saying of our Divine Master: "By their fruits you shall know them."[2] What can we conclude from these words except that the most meritorious acts may be only partially profitable if they are made with indifference? In no instance, then, is prayer to be blamed, but the defective dispositions of those who pray.

Finally, prayer gains us further merit, since exterior actions draw their greatest value from its exercise. In reality it is prayer which marks each of these exterior works with a deep and precious seal; that of divine love.

And how is this? The morning's prayer enkindles in our heart the fire of this love, and this fire remains smouldering, as it were,

[1] John 4: 24. [2] Matth. 7: 16.

throughout the day. But from a smouldering fire it is easy to cause sparks to rise; so when a fervent prayer has been made in the morning, the soul finds no difficulty in repeating every hour, every half-hour, or even more frequently, fervent acts of the love of God, the repetition of these acts with the most divine and therefore meritorious intention, consecrates our daily actions to the glory of God, and a single day thus becomes more meritorious than a whole month without prayer.

CHAPTER III

THIRD ADVANTAGE OF PRAYER:

It leads to Christian perfection

Christian perfection is nothing else but a union of love with God; in other words, it is the unitive life.

In its essence, it consists in the transformation of our will into the divine will, so that we no longer wish for anything but what God wishes, and because He wishes it, infinitely worthy as He is in Himself of being loved. In order to arrive at this state, the soul must pass through various stages, which we will examine in turn.

First, the soul must not only be purified from deliberate sin, but must also change its irregular inclinations, as far, at least, as human weakness will allow. Indeed, if an earthly prince refuses to enter the unclean hovel of a subject, it is evident that God, the Sovereign Lord of all things, could not visit a soul in order to contract with it the union of love, unless it were previously cleansed of its stains.

The process of cleansing is a great one

and no one can make it successful without the help of prayer. The first cleansing consists in never again committing a deliberate venial sin. Now, that is impossible to one who is aided only by that grace which God refuses to none. A powerful grace is required, which God grants only to fervent petition, the peculiar characteristic of prayer.

When the soul has succeeded in no longer committing deliberate venial sins, there remains a second and more difficult cleansing to be effected: the rooting out of nature's disordered inclinations. How is this to be done—again, by means of prayer.

In order to get rid of these evil inclinations two things really are necessary: to see them clearly and then to arm oneself with the courage and perseverance requisite for their eradication. Now it is during prayer that the Holy Ghost sheds a light on the soul which makes it see even its smallest defects. As long as night lasts, the gardener does not see weeds in his garden, but when the sun rises, he perceives them. In like manner when the soul does not meditate seriously, it does not see the multitude of its imperfections, because it remains plunged in spir-

itual darkness; but when the soul applies itself to this holy exercise, the Holy Ghost enlightens it and reveals to it even its smallest defect.

In most cases God, Who in His providence arranges all with a gentle force, proportions this light to the strength which He infuses into the soul, and only discloses to it the fault which it can correct. Sometimes, however, many more defects are disclosed than the soul can root out. God's object in this case is to humiliate the soul by showing it its weakness, so as to exalt it later, in accordance with St. Peter's thought: "Be you humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the time of visitation."[1]

But whatever the method by which God enlightens the soul as it prays, sooner or later He will certainly disclose to it all its faults, so that the soul, strengthened and encouraged, may finally succeed in destroying them. Where are the helps, indispensable in such a difficult task, to be found? Once more, in prayer; for it is only in prayer that the Holy Ghost shows the soul the ineffable value of a union of love with God and fills the heart with the desire of

[1] Pet. 5: 6.

attaining to such union, following the example of the merchant in the Gospel, who discovered a pearl of great price and sold all that he had to buy it.

The cleansing of the soul once accomplished, there still remains its adornment with virtues: the second degree of Christian perfection. Just as an earthly king would not enter the house of one of his subjects if it were only clean, but at the same time unfurnished and without ornament, in like manner the King of Heaven could not visit a soul to be united to it by love, unless to purity of conscience was added the adornment of Christian virtues.

How is the soul to acquire virtues? By meditating on the mysteries of faith, especially the life and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our divine Master's example is truly, at one and the same time, clear, inspiring and consoling. It enlightens us, since virtue shines immeasurably more bright in Jesus Christ than anywhere else. His example charms us, because Jesus Christ "attracts and triumphs by reason of His beauty, and draws us by the odor of His ointments."[1] Lastly, His example is consoling, because

[1] Ps. 44: 5; Cant. 1: 3.

Jesus lightens the labor by the loving union of His Divine Heart with ours. He has not bidden us carry our cross alone, but carry it with Him: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."[1]

O the wonderful change which takes place in the soul that labors perseveringly to gain an intimate knowledge of the divine King, so as to love and follow Him more.[2] At last it sees, in place of the briars of earthly inclinations, virtues growing and flourishing and sending their odor to heaven. The mystic garden where God is accustomed to contract the union of love is filled with blossom; Divine Goodness is pleased by it, inclines towards it and the soul is visited.

But one visit only is not enough to effect the total transformation of the human into the Divine Will, a transformation which in its essence constitutes the union of love, or the unitive life. Just as a single visit paid by an earthly prince to one of his subjects is not sufficient to produce similarity of ideas, so a single visit of God to the soul

[1] Matth. 16: 24.
[2] *Spiritual Exercises*—1 week 2, contempl. 1, prel. 3.

is insufficient to make it adopt purely Divine feelings. The transformation of the human into the Divine Will can only be accomplished by frequent converse between God and the soul, that is, by prayer; but if the soul perseveres, this transformation will take place without fail in course of time. If, indeed, by associating with men of evil life we become perverted, and by associating with the virtuous, we ourselves become virtuous, how can we deny that prayer, which is frequent and intimate intercourse with God, has the power of making us more Divine?

Yes, it is while praying that the soul, enraptured by the infinite beauty of God's Will, comes to regard God's slightest wish as of more importance than all created things; not only those which the world prizes, such as riches, honor and pleasure, but even those which are truly valuable, such as spiritual consolation. Thus the soul follows Our Lord's example, Who, deprived of all sensible joys and in agony said: "Father, not my will, but thine be done!"[1]

It is during prayer that the soul which has been rendered God-like comes to account

[1] Luke 22: 42.

the least degree of glory procured for God as of more worth than all the pleasures of earth. At such a time, the soul transformed into Jesus Christ, realizes that during this short life no greater proof of love can be given to God than suffering for Him, and chooses, instead of earthly joy, poverty, reproach and persecution borne for love of Him. Then at last, following the example of Our Lord when delivering Himself up to His Passion, it learns to say: "But that the world may know that I love the Father: And as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I. Arise, let us go hence!"[1]

Spiritual writers, following St. Thomas, distinguish three degrees of Christian perfection: The purgative life, in course of which the soul purifies itself from sin and imperfection; the illuminative life, in course of which the soul labors to acquire virtue; the unitive life, when the soul transformed into God aspires only to glorify Him and accomplish His divine will; whether it be in prayer or in any other action. From what has been said it is clear that prayer leads the soul to these three stages of perfection.

[1] John 14: 31.

CHAPTER IV

FOURTH ADVANTAGE OF PRAYER: IT CAUSES THE SOUL TO TASTE SPIRITUAL JOYS INCOMPARABLY SUPERIOR TO ALL THE FALSE PLEASURES OF THE WORLD.

"How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God,"[1] says the royal prophet.

These tabernacles of the Lord are the mystic sanctuary of prayer where the soul holds converse with God, as a son with his father. They are a thousand times more delightful than all the pleasures of the world, for in this converse the soul finds celestial joys which thrill it with delight.

The first of these joys is peace, surpassing all thought and penetrating heart and mind. "And the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."[2] And if you ask the nature of this peace, it resembles in the first place the rest which follows victory: the soul,

[1] Ps. 83: 2, 3. [2] Phil. 4: 7.

having conquered its passions by the aid of prayer or, at least, feeling that it has the passions under control, is as happy as the king who rides over the battle-field which he has won.

Further, it is rest in true liberty of spirit. By the light of prayer the soul clearly sees the nothingness of things transitory, the infinite value of things eternal; it understands that all outside of God is nothing, that God, the Sovereign Good, is everything. The outcome of this is a wonderful detachment from creatures, freeing the soul from the deceptive bonds of this world and establishing it in true liberty, where it enjoys delicious rest. Closing the eyes to all phantoms and earthly deceptions, the soul opens them to look on God, the only true, eternal and supreme good and cries out: "One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;"[1] and again: "For what have I in heaven? and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion for ever!"[2]

[1] Ps. 26: 4. [2] Ps. 72: 25, 26.

But over and above all else, the peace which surpasses all understanding is the rest found in God's Will, infinitely just, holy, adorable and worthy of love; an unselfish rest, which makes the soul say with Jesus in the Garden: "Father, not my will, but thine be done!"[1] or again: "The chalice which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?"[2]

Hope is the second spiritual joy produced by prayer. By constantly meditating on the Holy Gospel the soul, little by little, is imbued with this consoling thought, which Our Lord recalls so often: that the pains and sufferings of life on earth are the gold with which the infinite happiness of heaven is bought. Then, instinctively, in reverse of fortune the soul says to itself: "Blessed are the poor;" in affliction: "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake," finding true and solid consolation in words which it realizes in its very depths.

Love of God is the third and most exalted of the joys experienced in prayer. Nothing is sweeter than love; to seek to prove it would be both useless and superfluous.

[1] Luke 22: 42. [2] John 18: 11.

Now all prayer is filled with this sweetness, for in its essence prayer is familiar intercourse with God like that of friend with friend, father with son; and consequently it is an intercourse of love.

And if you ask how far the sweetness of this love extends, the answer is: to such a point that we come to love what nature and the world detest: poverty, sickness, contempt, ingratitude, hard work and death. When rising from prayer, St. Francis Xavier used to cry: "Lord, still more work!" It was prayer that inspired St. Teresa to cry from the bottom of her heart: "To suffer or to die!"

To say that all souls who make serious prayer arrive at such transports of joy would be an exaggeration, but this is certain, that, by means of the light gained in meditation, everyone of these souls understands the value of suffering and learns that, during our mortal life, we are better able to respond to God's love by suffering than by any other means. Henceforth the soul succeeds not only in accepting the trials of this life with resignation, but still more, it prefers them to the deceptive joys which the worlding so ardently pursues.

CHAPTER V

FIFTH ADVANTAGE OF PRAYER

It gives apostolic works their true fruit

St. Ignatius says that the apostolic worker is an instrument connected at one and the same time with God and with souls, whose sanctification will be more or less perfect in proportion as the apostolic worker has been more or less closely united to God as his instrument.[1]

This is a happy comparison. A great sculptor can sometimes carve a statue, a real master-piece, with a poor chisel; a famous artist will paint a valuable picture with a bad brush; but however good the brush or the chisel, if they were handled by inferior workmen, the work would always be imperfect. In the same way, an apostolic worker of only moderate knowledge and eloquence, who is yet an instrument closely united to the hand of the Divine and all powerful Worker, will effect wonders in souls; whilst if he is only partially united to God, the result of his work will always be imper-

[1] *Const. S.J.*, P. 10, n. 2.

fect, in spite of eloquence and knowledge and tact.

Now how is the apostolic worker to become an instrument united to God? By prayer, in which he is accustomed to converse with God as a child with its father, seeking not his own glory but God's, doing not his own will but God's; trusting not in his own strength but in God, the Almighty and the All-Bountiful.

In order to teach us this lesson by His own example, Our Lord prepared Himself for his apostolic life by forty days' prayer in the Desert and, when about to redeem the world on Calvary, He willed to spend the night in prayer in the garden of Gethsemani.

Since that time, nothing great has been done in the Church without prayer. Those specially chosen by God as His instruments have become united to the Divine Worker only through prolonged prayer. At the end of ten days' prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the Upper Room, the Apostle saw the Holy Ghost descend in the form of fiery tongues, transforming them from men weak and worldly, into the men, filled with heavenly virtue, who converted the world.

Since the Divine mission of the Apostles, nothing has taken place in the Church of greater importance than the foundation of the Religious Orders; a close union, then, was necessary between those taking part in this great work and God, and the union was brought about by prolonged prayer made in solitude and often lasting several years. The cave of Subiaco, the many sanctuaries where St. Dominic was rapt in ecstasy, the rocky heights of Mount Alvernus, the solitude of Clairvaux, the grotto of Manresa tell us in what school God was so long fashioning the great founders, Benedict, Dominic, Francis, Bernard and Ignatius.

The triumphs of the Christian apostolate are still one of the great wonders of the Church's history, and there is nothing more illustrious than the names of St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis of Sales, St. John Francis Regis, St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, St. Alphonsus Ligouri. Now, all these great apostles of souls were men of great prayer. Let us imitate them, as far as grace is given us, and we shall become true apostles, producing lasting fruit in the salvation of souls.

PART II

The Principal Acts of Prayer

CHAPTER I

PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

PRAYER is a Divine work, and therefore the Holy Ghost is the most perfect teacher of how it may be well made.

Nevertheless, God demands the co-operation of the soul, whose first care must be to prepare itself for this great act. By omitting the preparation, or by making it in a careless manner, the soul tempts God. As the Book of Ecclesiasticus says: "Before prayer prepare thy soul: and be not as a man that tempteth God."[1]

A good preparation consists, first, in purifying the intention and disregarding the presence or absence of spiritual consolation, which will be wanting, perhaps, even in spite of a solid preparation. What does it matter? Meditation is not made in order that the joys of heaven may be found in it but because it is a means of glorifying God and sanctifying our soul. This view of it will prevent

[1] Ecclus. 18: 23.

deception, disastrous to progress in prayer and virtue alike, and draw down God's blessings in abundance on our prayer.

Once we are indifferent to sensible favors and resigned to God's holy Will, we must choose the subject of our meditation! "Although in itself," says St. Ignatius, "the third consideration, that of the Divine Persons, is more perfect than the second, that of the mysteries connected with Our Lord, and the second more perfect than the first, namely, the consideration of our sins, yet by far the best plan for each individual is to choose that consideration in which God, Our Lord, communicates Himself most freely to the soul, sharing with it His most holy gifts and spiritual graces; for He knows and sees what is most suitable to each, and knowing all, points out the road which each ought to follow."[1]

And yet the three subjects just mentioned should not be chosen to the exclusion of all others, for in every meditation there are three beings of whom we must never lose sight: The first is God, the Sovereign Lord of all things, Who on account of His infinite

[1] *Borgia*, p. 268; *Lettre* 58, a *St. Frànçois*.

perfections is worthy of boundless love and respect. For how can we treat with Him of what concerns His glory and the interests of our soul if we lose sight of what He is, His power and what He wants to do for us?

The second being is Jesus Christ, our divine Redeemer, who is in truth our Mediator, our Physician, our Master, our only Road to Heaven; in a word He is, in prayer as in everything else concerned with our salvation and sanctity, the Way. Hence it is clear that if we become separated from Him we shall not reach the end of our journey.

And lastly, ourselves. We shall do well not to lose sight of the multitude of our sins, the waywardness of our passions, the spiritual maladies which threaten us, our own feeble strength, the great need in which we stand that God should help us and take possession of our hearts. Otherwise we shall not pray well, nor correct those faults which prevent our union with God.

It is clear, then, that we should choose one of the three subjects just mentioned for special consideration without neglecting the two others. If no particular attraction be felt, the meditation should, in the generality

of cases, be made on the life and death of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The subject once chosen, the next step is to prepare it. Many do this by reading a passage from Holy Writ, especially from the Gospels. Such persons are to be praised, for the preparation thus becomes more personal and therefore more practical and fruitful. "If the person who is making the contemplation," says St. Ignatius, "takes the true groundwork of the narrative and, discussing and considering for himself, finds something which makes the events a little clearer or brings them a little more home to him, whether this comes through his own reasoning, or because his intellect is enlightened by the Divine power, he will get more spiritual relish and fruit, than if he who is giving the exercises had much explained and amplified the meaning of the events." In this case, too, we may have recourse to the general and well-known developments. For instance, if the subject be some mystery of the Passion one may consider: 1. The intensity of the sufferings of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, so as to arouse compassion for them; 2. The enormity of sin, which has caused

such suffering, so as to be filled with a horror of it; 3. The infinite magnitude of the benefit received; hence, to return thanks to God for His goodness; 4. God's incomprehensible love for us, shown clearly in this mystery, and so, ardently to return that love; 5. The unfathomable wisdom of the eternal providence, so as to admire and praise God for it; 6. The incomparable virtue of Our Lord shown here more clearly than anywhere else, so as to be brought to imitate it.

In the same way, if we are meditating on a passage from the Gospels, such as: "If any one will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."[1] We might try to answer the following questions:

What considerations urge me to comply with this teaching?

How have I followed it up to the present?

What measures must I take to make it my rule of life?

What ought I to do for the future?

It must be admitted, however, that a great number of those who meditate daily prefer to use a book in which they have many thoughts suggested by the writer. This

[1] Matth. 16: 24.

method requires only an attentive reading of the text, an effort to imprint it on the mind, and consideration of the fruit which may be drawn from it for one's spiritual advancement.

The preparation in its strict sense completed, our task is not finished; it is still of the utmost importance to keep recollected until beginning the meditation proper. The preparation is usually made before retiring for the night. The subject should be again reviewed in a cursory manner just before going to sleep, and it should be the first thought on awaking next morning. Finally, while dressing, we should direct our thoughts to the subject of meditation, or at least to some pious subject, so as to exclude the day's pre-occupations. Such is the advice of St. Ignatius.[1]

This effort to keep recollected until the moment of meditation has a double advantage: in the first place, as the mind is not busied with thoughts foreign to the subject, distractions are avoided and the soul's conversewith God is greatly facilitated; and in the second place, the generous effort to keep silent and recollected draws down innumerable graces.

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Addit., 1, 2.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ACT, THAT OF PLACING ONESELF IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, WHICH MUST NEVER BE OMITTED IN BEGINNING A MEDITATION

When a person has been admitted to the presence of an earthly king, it would be most unbecoming for him not to think from the very first of what he is going to say. What can be said, then, of a soul which has been granted the unspeakable privilege of conversing with God and is bold enough to forget that it is in presence of the Divine Majesty, or only to think of it in a more or less vague way?

And here a question arises. Is it enough to place oneself in presence of God by an act of the reason, which proves to us that He is present everywhere?

No, that is not enough. We must place ourselves in presence of God by faith. Prayer is more than an audience granted by God, the Creator and Sovereign Lord of all things, to a creature; it is familiar intercourse like that of children with their father, or of friend

with friend. Now this last mystic view of prayer so surpasses the powers of our intellect that this could not even suspect its truth and Divine Wisdom has been obliged to reveal it: "Behold," says St. John, "what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God."[1]

This placing of ourselves in God's presence is the most important act of meditation, for it is the basis of all others. It is well, then, to point out different ways of doing it and each one may choose that which appeals to him most, according to the impulse of grace.

The first method is to see God present everywhere, in His entirety both in the whole and in each atom of the universe. "If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there: If I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me: and Thy right hand shall hold me."[2]

Not only is God present in the universe by reason of His essence, pervading the

[1] I. Ep. 3: I. [2] Ps. 138: 8, 9, 10.

immensity of space and each molecule in somewhat the same way as the soul pervades the body, but He is also present by reason of His power, preserving to all things the existence which they would lose, to return into nothingness, if He withdrew. He is equally present in virtue of His knowledge, as the outcome of which He knows everything that takes place, and so even our most secret thoughts. We are immersed in God a thousand times more thoroughly than fish in the sea or the body in the air. "In Him," says St. Paul, "we live and move and are."[1]

The second method is to regard God as present in Heaven. God is everywhere and yet He is said to dwell in heaven, for there He works wonders such as He effects nowhere else. This placing of oneself in the presence of God by considering Him as present in heaven is an excellent method, in that it raises our hearts above earthly things and fits us for holding converse with Our Heavenly Father without distractions. Thus it was that David prayed: "To Thee have I lifted up my eyes Who dwellest in heaven."[2] In

[1] Acts 17: 28. [2] Ps. 122: 1.

the same way Isaias says: "I will cry like a young swallow, I will meditate like a dove: My eyes are weakened looking upward."[1]

It is the teaching of Our Lord, however, that especially shows the excellence of this practice, for He encourages us in our prayers to think of God as dwelling in heaven. "Thus shall you pray," he says, "'Our Father Who art in heaven;'" and adding example to precept, Jesus used to pray with his eyes raised to heaven. "These things Jesus spoke, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said: 'Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee.'"[2]

The third method is to consider God as present in our soul, where He dwells, not only as in the rest of the creation, but in a wonderful and special way. God is present by reason of His essence, power and knowledge even in irrational creatures, but He dwells in the soul of the just man as a friend and Father. So that, even if He withdrew Himself from the brute creation, allowing it to relapse into nothingness—an impossible hypothesis—still he would remain in the soul of man imprisoned by His love. "If

[1] Is. 38: 14. [2] John 17: 1.

any man love me," says Our Lord, "he will keep My word, and My Father will love him and We will make our abode with him."[1]

This is the most perfect method of placing oneself in the presence of God for the purpose of prayer, which is an intimate conversation with God, and in course of which it is fitting that we should seek for Him in the sanctuary of our souls, where He dwells as a most devoted Friend, a most tender Father. This thought was particularly dear to the Saints, many of whom liked to think of God as handing over the government of the world to His Angels for a time, so as to belong to them wholly and entirely during their prayer; just as a king entrusts the management of the state to his ministers for a short space, so as to enjoy without restraint the pure pleasures of family life with his children. A most pious, touching and, at the same time, correct thought, for God gives Himself as entirely to the soul in prayer as if it alone, of all the universe, were in existence.

The best method, however, for each individual soul is to place itself in the presence of

[1] John 14: 23.

God in that manner to which grace prompts it, and for this reason several different methods have been mentioned here. Without doubt, that is a fortunate soul which God fills to the very depths with the exquisite sweetness of His presence—an unusual spiritual consolation. Such a favor is not always granted, however, and then it is better to seek God elsewhere.

And lastly, the fourth method of placing oneself in the presence of God is to regard Him as present in the sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. This method naturally suggests itself when the meditation is on the life and death of Our Lord, but especially when in presence of the most Blessed Sacrament.

CHAPTER III

SECOND PRELIMINARY ACT: ADORATION

Adoration is an act of the virtue of religion by which we confess God's infinite perfection and consequently our absolute dependance. This virtue of religion is connected with the cardinal virtue of justice, and so we pay to God this supreme honor of adoration because it is just to do so.

The necessity for making an act of adoration at the very beginning of prayer is evident. The first act of a subject when admitted to the audience of an earthly king should be a profound inclination. For a much stronger reason ought we, when admitted to the presence of God, King of Heaven, and Lord of all things, to pay Him the respect and supreme honor which are His due. The homage of which God alone is worthy is called adoration.

Let us not seek to excuse ourselves from rendering this homage by saying that prayer is a familiar intercourse between God and the soul, like that of father with son, for neither

familiarity nor tender and affectionate intercourse dispenses a son from respecting the author of his being.

God exacts this homage from us when He tells us: "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore and Him only shalt thou serve."[1] And again: "The son honoreth his father; if then I be a father, where is my honor?"[2]

There is certainly a difference between adoring God and humbling ourselves before Him, the reason which bends us before His all powerful Majesty not being the same in both cases. In adoring God we confess our absolute dependence as the result of His infinite perfections, whilst in humbling ourselves before Him we make confession of our lowliness.

In prayer, however, there is practically no difference between adoration and self-humiliation, since in neither case do we separate the idea of God's infinite Majesty from that of our extreme lowliness, but we attribute our absolute dependence to these two causes combined. Again, those Saints who have treated of prayer in their writings, when they speak of the necessity of adora-

[1] Matth. 4: 10. [2] Mal. 1: 6.

tion or self-humiliation at the beginning of the exercise, use the terms indifferently.

The soul may make its own choice as to the manner of adoration or self-humiliation: the act is essential, the method immaterial.

St. Ignatius advises us to humble ourselves by prostrating ourselves before God.[1] copying our Lord's example when He commenced His prayer in the Garden by throwing Himself flat on the ground: "And going a little further, he fell on His face praying."[2] Other Saints thought the recitation of the Confiteor preferable; others again that of the "Miserere."

In short, whatever method is used, we should fill our souls with the same thought as Abraham, the privileged friend of God: "I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes;"[3] or, better still, imitate the humility of Our Lady, the most Blessed Virgin Mary, when she said: "My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . because He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid."[4]

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Addit. 3.
[2] Matth. 26: 39.
[3] Gen. 18: 27.
[4] Luke 1: 46, 48.

CHAPTER IV

THIRD PRELIMINARY ACT: PETITION TO THE HOLY GHOST FOR GRACE

PRAYER is a supernatural work, essentially requiring the grace of the Holy Ghost. To obtain this, prayer is necessary.

The ignorant and uneducated may watch an earthly king from a distance, but a private audience is never granted to them; their mean condition prevents such a favor. For the same but yet stronger reason, we must be worthy of being admitted to the friendly audience granted by the King of Heaven. Since nature here has no power, it is most imperative that we beg for help from the Holy Ghost.

Prayer, again, may be considered as the souls's flight towards God. As the prophet says: "Who will give me wings like a dove and I will fly and be at rest?"[1] The Holy Ghost has the power of giving us these heavenly wings, but we must make petition for them.

[1] Ps. 54: 7.

Prayer is likewise a hymn praising God's glory: "I will sing to the Name of the Lord, the most High![1] O God I will sing to Thee with the harp, Thou holy One of Israel!"[2] And again: "To Thee, O God, I will sing a new canticle; on the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings I will sing praises to Thee!"[3]

In this sacred canticle, the soul is the living instrument, the Holy Ghost the Divine Artist Who touches it. When He is not present, the harp remains silent, but when He enters our heart to touch its strings our soul resounds with melody and becomes so pleasing to God that He never tires of listening to it and saying to it: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, . . . let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet."[4] We must implore this Divine Spirit to come to our assistance.

In short, God never refuses His grace to a just soul in its efforts to pray, but He only gives it in abundance to those who, like the Apostles in the Cenacle, ask for it in

[1] Ps. 7: 18.
[2] Ps. 70: 22.
[3] Ps. 143: 9.
[4] Cant. 2: 13, 14.

prayer, supplication and tears. The petition must be fervent.

Let us examine how, in practice, this request may be suitably made.

St. Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* counsels the following prayer: "I will ask Christ our Lord that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty."[1] St. Francis Xavier had a special affection for the "Veni, Creator Spiritus." Other Saints preferred the "Veni, Sancte Spiritus." Here again, the prayer is essential, but a set form of words is not; each is free to choose for himself.

After praying to the Holy Ghost, it is a useful practice to invoke the Holy Angels, to whom divine Wisdom has entrusted the office of assisting us in prayer. "When thou didst pray with tears, I offered thy prayer to the Lord,"[2] the angel Raphael said to Tobias. And with the same meaning David said: "I will sing praises to thee in the sight of the Angels."[3]

Angels have been assigned to us, too, by

[1] *Spiritual Exercises.* Week 1, Exerc. 1.
[2] Tob. 12: 3. [3] Ps. 137: 1.

God to unite themselves to our hymns of praise and to offer our prayers to the Lord. These are our Guardian Angels, and if we do not invoke them, we are depriving ourselves of powerful aid.

And then what has been said of the Angels applies much more truly to the Queen of Angels. Invocation of Our Lady is therefore most effective.

CHAPTER V

IN MEDITATION BOTH THE HIGHER AND LOWER POWERS OF THE SOUL MUST BE ACTIVE. FIRST, HOW TO APPLY THE IMAGINATION AND THE SENSITIVE APPETITE

Everyone knows that the soul has three higher powers—memory, intellect and will—and two lower powers—imagination and sensitive appetite. This last goes with the various feelings of the will by movements of love or hate, hope or fear, joy or sadness.

In every intercourse, we make use of these five powers. Hence we call them into play in prayer, which is familiar intercourse with God. It is clear that the order in which the acts of these different powers are performed is essentially subject to variation and so cannot be prescribed absolutely. But in a treatise on prayer, to avoid confusion, we must study the faculties in succession. Let us begin with the lower powers, the imagination and the sensitive appetite.

To exercise the imagination is to cause it to produce an interior representation of

the Mystery, such as the Stable of Bethlehem, the Hall of the Scourging, Calvary, etc.

The advantages of this picture of the imagination are three:

The imagination is piously employed and tends less to spread itself on things foreign to the prayer. In this way one of the chief causes of distraction is avoided and the soul can more easily unite itself with God in peace.

In the second place, the sensitive appetite —a blind faculty, which is set in action piously or not according to the images presented to it—is turned from its perverse tendencies to tears of devotion or something similar.

Finally, these pictures give rise to holy thoughts in the intellect, pious recollections in the memory, and wholesome feelings in the will. No one can deny that the tears of contrition, or of sympathy with Our Lord in His sufferings, or of longing for Heaven, help to produce holy movements in the will.

However, we must not forget that there are souls not highly gifted on the side of the imagination, and which would spend

their efforts in vain to produce in themselves attractive pictures. Such souls will do better not to urge the use of these secondary faculties. Let them be satisfied with doing their best to keep the imagination and the sensitive appetite quiet.

CHAPTER VI

THE EXERCISE OF THE MEMORY AND UNDERSTANDING

THE memory must be used in recalling the subject of Meditation prepared the previous night. If the difficulty of doing this is too great, a book may be used, not in such a way as to substitute reading for meditation, but just to glance over the main ideas of the subject.

The understanding must be exercised in the three following processes:

First, in returning several times to the ideas which we have read or heard explained. Just as the rain penetrates the earth only drop by drop so as to fertilize it, in the same way Our Lord's teaching only enters the soul gradually in order to change its earthly view of things to a heavenly and divine one. Those who meditate cannot impress too firmly on their minds the fact that it is useless to pass hurriedly from one item to another. They should pause at the first consideration until the soul can obtain no

more from it. So let the same thought be dwelt upon as long as any light, realization or spiritual fruit is gained from it, for it is not abundance of learning which gives the soul contentment and satisfaction, but the realization and spiritual appreciation of the truths upon which it is meditating.[1] Yet it must be acknowledged that there are some souls which need a great number of ideas. One can dwell for half an hour on the same thought, another is quickly satisfied and needs a change at the end of a few minutes. Let each examine his own experience and act in accordance with what it shows is best for him.

In the second place, the understanding is not to rest content with allowing itself to be gradually penetrated by the ideas read or heard, but is to study the subject as fully as it can. Indeed, if those who meditate succeed by means of reason or reflection in finding anything which gives a better insight into the subject, whether by the use of reason or by means of that divine light which sheds its beams upon the understanding, they will obtain great spiritual fruit.[2]

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Annot. 2.   [2] *Spiritual Exercises*, Annot. 2.

I say that the understanding must do this as far as it can, for some intellects would be wearing themselves out to no purpose by trying to penetrate the subject more deeply. These should be satisfied with the first method, that is, simply to make what they have heard or read part of themselves.

Thirdly, the intellect ought to make some personal and practical applications with a view to the correction of faults, the acquisition of virtue and the union of the will with God's. These are called resolutions, and they form one of the principal ends of meditation. The work of their formation can be definitely accomplished only by the will which accepts them, but the understanding must do the preparation.

Resolutions ought to be particular, applicable here and now, supported with reasons, and humble.[1]

Particular. It is not enough to say in a general way: I will be humble, charitable, obedient; but we must say: I will accept this humiliation, pardon that injury, do generously that special thing which costs me an effort.

[1] Roothaan, *De ratione meditandi*, Proposita.

Applicable here and now. We must be able to put them in practice that very day. A general desire for God's glory is doubtless an excellent thing and wins the divine approbation in a very special manner, as we see in many passages of Holy Writ: "I am come to show it (the vision) to thee because thou art a man of desires," said the Angel Gabriel to Daniel.[1] But these holy desires cannot take the place of real resolutions.

Supported with reasons. Resolutions, indeed, have no attraction in themselves and so we cannot be spurred on to carry them out except by the thought of the advantages they will procure for us.

Humble. Considering the corruptness of our nature, we stand in need of a powerful grace to enable us to keep them; now "God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace."[2]

[1] Daniel 9: 23. [2] I Pet. 5: 5.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACT OF FAITH THE MOST PERFECT OF THE ACTS WHICH THE INTELLECT CAN MAKE IN PRAYER

"FAITH," according to the Council of the Vatican, "is a supernatural virtue by which, prevented and helped by the grace of God, we believe what has been revealed by Him, not on account of the intrinsic truth of the matters as grasped by the natural light of reason, but on the authority of God Himself Who reveals them and cannot deceive nor be deceived."[1]

In meditating, the truths under consideration must be known not only by reason, but further, by faith. Prayer may be compared to a supernatural edifice; its foundation, therefore, an act of the intellect, must also be supernatural. So when meditating on God's perfections as revealed by reason—such as His infinite Wisdom, Justice, and so on—the certainity arising from the natural light of reason alone cannot suffice. We

[1] Sess. 3, c. 3.

must add to it a certainty of a superior order, namely, faith.

Besides, many mysteries, such as the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Holy Eucharist, and our adoption as children of God, could not be suspected as true by the reason. They can be known only as revealed by God's authority—that is to say, by faith.

I do not mean, however, that a formal act of faith in a particular mystery is necessary for meditating on that mystery. Those who practise prayer regularly have the habit of accepting truths revealed because of God's authority, and in virtue of this disposition they make a real act of faith without thinking expressly of that authority. It is quite possible to be actuated by a particular motive without thinking of it expresely, as, for instance, when a sick person takes disagreeable medicine so as to regain health, without, however, thinking formally of that aim.[1]

Thus, in order to meditate profitably on Our Lord's Nativity, it is not essential to make a formal act of faith and say: "My God, I believe that Thou didst take

[1] Suarez, *De voluntario*, disp. 8, sect. 3, n. 4.

flesh and wast born of the Virgin Mary, because Thou hast so revealed it."

Nevertheless, a formal act of faith is most beneficial in meditation and ought to be made frequently, for it contains two advantages:

First, it is an offering which gives special glory to God and at the same time is very profitable to our soul. Being commanded by the will, it has the assent of the intellect. Therefore those who make an act of faith offer to God their noblest and most precious possessions: the intellect and the will. Here we have a spiritual victim, infinitely superior to the bloody offerings of the Old Law as Our Lord says: "But the hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. God is a spirit and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth." [1]

Secondly, a formal act of faith is an excellent way of shaking off torpid feelings and banishing distractions. It is doubtless expedient to follow the advice usually given and banish distractions by returning to our subject humbly and gently, yet should we feel more than usually dull and distracted, it

[1] John 4: 23, 24.

is useful to make an explicit act of faith on the mystery upon which we are meditating, for in so doing we shall gain vigor and impetus.

For instance if we are contemplating Jesus Christ Our Lord crucified, in order to banish importunate distractions or unusual sloth, we might say: "My God, I believe that Thou didst die upon the Cross to redeem me, for Thou hast so revealed it."

CHAPTER VIII

WHY ACTS OF THE WILL ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THOSE OF THE UNDERSTANDING

BEGINNING with the highest, the acts of the will are: hope and charity. After these acts of the theological virtues come adoration, thanksgiving, prayer properly so called or petition, contrition and oblation.

All these acts are more important than those made by the intellect. The understanding discovers the truth, but the will profits of the discovery in order to acquire Christian virtues. What is the good of knowing the truth if it does not make us better? The pagan philosophers possessed the truth, but they did not follow it and thus it only served to make them more guilty and hateful in the sight of God. "Because that when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks; but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise they became fools."[1]

[1] Rom. 1: 21, 22.

Let us borrow some metaphors used by the Saints and the Directors of the Spiritual life. It is the understanding which provides the spiritual banquet, the will which partakes of it and so nourishes the soul. The understanding discovers the pearl of great price spoken of in the Gospel, but the will sells all to gain possession of the gem. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way and sold all that he had and bought it."[1] The understanding collects the wood for the sacrifice, the will lights the pile and consumes the holocaust.

The conclusion to be drawn from these comparisons is evident.

First, since these acts of the will are the goal, while those of the understanding are the road, whoever acts in accordance with the dictates of reason ought to leave the last to give his attention to the first, when he feels his will stirred, or—and then with greater reason—seized by a loving desire of praising, honoring and serving God. To do otherwise would be like beginning the

[1] Matth. 13: 45, 46.

journey over again when the goal has been reached, or putting out the fire of the holocaust only to light it again afterwards.

It is another matter when the acts of the will become remiss. In such a case, in order to revive the soul's ardor, we must have recourse again to reasoning and reflection.

Secondly, since acts of the will give more glory to God and are more advantageous for the spiritual wellbeing of the soul, we must say of this faculty what has been said of the intellect, and with greater reason, that we should not hasten from one act to another, but linger until the soul is fully satisfied, for it is not wealth of feelings but their interior appreciation which nourishes the soul and unites it to God.

Lastly, we must conlude that not only those who prepare too little matter and thus wilfully expose themselves to dryness of soul are to be blamed, but likewise those who give way to far-fetched reflections and so cannot give time enough to the affections and colloquies. Meditation does not mean the study of a question for the sole purpose of investigating its truth: it means specially to listen to God, to speak to Him, to offer

to work for His glory and to do His Holy Will in all things.

All the acts of the will have not, however, the same value; the act of charity, being an act of a theological virtue, is in its essence more perfect than the act of adoration or thanksgiving, which proceed from the virtue of justice, yet for each individual soul that act is best towards which it feels impelled by grace. In the same way as a good musician draws harmony from even a poor instrument, so the Divine Spirit, Whose power knows no limits, can make a virtue of lower rank produce, when He so wills it, acts most glorious in the sight of God and most meritorious in view of eternal life.

CHAPTER IX

THE ACT OF HOPE

CHRISTIAN hope is composed of two elements: the desire of possessing God, the Sovereign Good, fully in heaven, and perfect confidence that sufficeint grace to obtain this end will be bestowed on us through the merits of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

The desire to possess God, when we regard Him as our Sovereign Good, is nothing else but an interested love of God, this being the name that St. Francis of Sales often substitutes for love of concupiscence, the term used by theologians, as requiring less explanation. Although this interested love is not so perfect as charity, or the disinterested love of God, in which the soul has no thought of personal gain, yet it is good and very good, as Holy Writ never ceases to tell us. "I rejoiced," says the Prophet, "at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord![1] As the hart panteth after the fountains of water: so my soul

[1] Ps. 121: 1.

panteth after Thee, O God![1] This is my rest for ever and ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it."[2]

Our Lord in particular constantly urges us to the desire of Heaven. In the Our Father He makes us ask for this boon by saying: "Thy Kingdom come." When speaking of what is most perfect, the Evangelical Counsels, He exhorts us to practise them from hope of reward: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."[3] And again: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, be glad and rejoice for your reward is very great in Heaven."[4]

These passages and a multitude of others prove clearly how much God wishes us to excite ourselves to a desire of possessing Him fully for all eternity. God's love for us makes Him emphatic on this point and makes Him eager to enrich us with that possession which infinitely surpasses all others. In truth, the more we desire God on earth, the better we shall know Him and love Him

[1] Ps. 41: 1.
[2] Ps. 131: 14.
[3] Matth. 19: 21.
[4] Matth. 5: 11, 12.

for all eternity in Heaven. Desire of God is the string which stretches the bow of our heart: the more bent the bow, the deeper the arrow penetrates God's Heart, preparing an everlasting refuge for us there

It is especially proper to yield to these holy desires on two occasions. First, when, under the influence of grace, we feel in our heart an unusual need of God that no created thing can satisfy. At such a time, we must follow the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and say with the Prophet: "For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?[1] Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?"[2] And again, when weighed down by the misfortunes of this life, where nature struggles against grace, the flesh against the spirit, where we offend God daily, and salvation is never fully assured, and we are induced to cry with the Apostle: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[3]

Besides the desires of God, hope comprises absolute confidence that we shall receive abundant grace to attain the possession

[1] Ps. 72: 25. [2] Ps. 54: 7. [3] Rom. 7: 24.

of this Sovereign Good for all eternity. This confidence is based on His infinite Power and Goodness, and above all, on His infallible promise of giving us heaven through the merits of Jesus Christ.

A soul which practises prayer ought to convince itself by frequent and consoling reflections that God, in His infinite Mercy, has given a treasure into our hands, sufficient a thousand times over to purchase Heaven. A single drop of Our Saviour's most precious Blood would gain eternal happiness for all mankind, and each one of us has the whole of this Blood as his own possession. By means of hope, then, we possess Heaven as surely, nay more surely, than he possesses that pearl who holds a hundred times the sum required to buy it on the day of sale.

The soul, filled with this thought, should give rein to feelings of confidence, saying over and over again: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?"[1] The soul should surrender itself to these feelings especially on the two following occasions:

First, when it is specially strengthened

[1] Ps. 26: 1.

by grace and feels able to overcome with ease the attacks of nature, the devil and the world. At such a time it should repeat with the Prophet: "Through my God I shall go over a wall;" [1] or with the Apostle: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." [2] But the soul must say this in humility and thanksgiving, and bear in mind its extreme weakness, and return thanks to the Divine Goodness for this strength which He has given. In a word: "Let him glory in the Lord," [3] and not in himself, otherwise a sad experience will teach it, as it did St. Peter, that it is not sufficient to say in an excess of fervor: "Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee." [4]

Secondly, the soul should redouble its confidence in time of spiritual desolation. Crushed under the weight of fear, weariness and sadness, the soul thinks itself at such a time incapable of overcoming even the smallest difficulty, and feeling itself separated from its Creator, despairs of being able to possess Him to the full in heaven. The moment has now arrived for showing more than usual

[1] Ps. 17: 30. [2] Philip 4: 13.
[3] I Cor. 1: 31. [4] Matth. 26: 35.

generosity by "hoping against hope in God's promise:"[1] and in the infinite merits of our Divine Saviour, Who assures us of victory: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy and your joy no man shall take from you."[2]

When Jesus expired on the cross of Calvary, all seemed lost: the Apostles had fled; a few women, who alone had remained faithful, stood weeping at the foot of the Cross; and—what He felt much more keenly than all the rest—Jesus seemed abandoned by His Father, and in His grief cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[3] And yet the hour of Redemption was close at hand, glorifying God the more because, now that all human means had disappeared, the finger of God would be the clearer.[4]

The order of Providence has not changed: it is the same heavenly law which rules all great undertakings in God's service. When everything falls away around the generous soul, when there is no human help at hand and God Himself withdraws from its side in prayer, then is the time to say with Jesus:

[1] Rom. 4: 18.
[2] John, 16: 20, 22.
[3] Matth. 27, 46.
[4] Exod. 8: 19.

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" and then hope should be the greater because all seems lost.

This hope is heroic, like the prayer on Calvary, and wins marvellous graces of sanctification for the soul, and miraculous conversions for the apostle.

CHAPTER X

CHARITY OR PURE LOVE OF GOD CONSISTS IN DESIRING EVERY KIND OF GOOD THING FOR GOD, BECAUSE HE IS INFINITELY WORTHY OF IT ON ACCOUNT OF HIS INFINITE PERFECTION

It is indispensable that souls who make prayer should be filled with the thought that God possesses an infinite claim to our love on account of His incomparable perfection.

The infinite perfection of God is seen not only in His attributes taken together, but also in each of them separately. Hence to obtain the pure love of charity it is sufficient to consider God's infinite Wisdom, or Power, or love for us, etc. Saints who have written of this subject repeat this statement over and over again.

I will content myself with quoting St. Alphonsus Liguori, who expresses his opinion in the following words: "When the confessor sees that a penitent keeps from mortal sin, he ought to do all in his power to place

him on the road of perfection and divine love by pointing out God's infinite claim to our love."[1]

The following proof may be given. It is not necessary to prove that to love a person is synonomous with wishing him well, for this is a fundamental principle which God has stamped on our hearts, and which develops with the use of reason. It is only left to show, then, that the cause of our wishing God well in every possible manner is the fact that He merits this on account of the infinite perfection of His nature.

It is related in the third Book of Kings that the Queen of Saba went up to Jerusalem and seeing the wisdom of Solomon, the magnificent palaces he had built, his sumptuous banquets, countless servants and the holocausts he offered in the Temple, she was filled with admiration and cried out in a transport of holy love: "Blessed are thy men and blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom! Blessed be the Lord thy God Whom thou hast pleased and Who hath set

[1] *Homo apostolicus*, Append. n. 1.

thee upon the throne of Israel!"[1] Then adding gifts to praise, she laid before the prince a hundred and twenty talents of gold, as well as a great store of precious stones and spices.

Where is the hope of reward in this case? And yet the Queen of Saba was content because she had followed the dictates of her heart, which was filled with admiration, and had given all to Solomon, as worthy of it.

Something similar, yet infinitely more grand. takes place in the soul which has charity. By faith the soul knows that God contains every perfection infinitely and to such an extent that all created and all possible things are as nothing in His presence. Then, in a transport of admiration and following the inclination of the heart, the soul, too, praises God because He possesses every perfection to an infinite degree, is fully sufficient in Himself, enjoys boundless happiness—in a word, because He is God.

The soul joins to this praise, with which alone it is not content, the offering of all it possesses, undertaking to glorify God in its own case by acquiring virtues; in that of

[1] 3 Kings 10: 8, 9.

others, by doing all in its power that all mankind may know, love and praise Him, do His Holy Will and so gain heaven, there to sing His praises in most perfect harmony.

Let the Saints be our models. St. Ignatius contemplates the sky or even a little flower, seeing in each God's Almighty Power, since an infinite power was necessary to create it; a ray of His Divine Beauty, for Solomon in all his glory was never so magnificently adorned; and, finally, God's Goodness, which caused the flower to bloom so that he might enjoy its beauty. And from contemplation he passes on to admiration, and from admiration there arises in his heart such boundless devotedness that he writes, "To the greater glory of God" a hundred and seventy-seven times in his "Constitutions."[1] But it was especially during prayer that St. Ignatius dwelt with delight on the Divine perfections, and letting his heart speak without restraint, cried: "O cherished Word of God, teach me to be generous, teach me to serve Thee as Thou deservest, to give without counting the cost, to fight without heeding the wounds, to work without seeking rest, to spend myself

[1] Cf. Suarez, *De religione Soc. Jes.*, l. 8, c. 6, 1, V. T. 16, p. 948.

without looking for any other reward but that of knowing that I am doing Thy will." That is indeed serving God for Himself alone, and because He merits it; that is indeed the pure love of charity!

As for St. Francis Xavier, he had these words always on his lips: "O most Holy Trinity! O most Holy Trinity!" The indescribable perfections of the Godhead had been revealed to a lively faith, and filled him with admiration. This admiration penetrated his heart and there gave rise to a zeal for God's glory, which consumed him. "Lord, more work!" was the cry of his soul. India did not satisfy this zeal; it demanded Japan too, and after Japan, China. God had compassion on this wounded heart, and called him to that blessed abode, where, in the midst of the delights of an ocean of love, a song untouched by any shade of sadness is heard: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, our God, to receive glory and honor." [1]

[1] Apoc. 4: 11.

CHAPTER XI

A SOUL IN WHICH THERE IS THE PURE LOVE OF CHARITY STRIVES FURTHERMORE TOWARDS UNION WITH GOD, SO AS TO NO LONGER LIVE FOR ITSELF BUT FOR GOD

THE first essential element of charity is a supreme well-wishing to God, but there are other elements. St. Thomas says: Love which arises from the intellectual appetite differs from devotion, for the former includes a certain desire of union between the person who loves and the one loved, and for this reason the philosopher said: "Well-wishing is the first principle of friendship." Charity, then, does not stop at well-wishing, but adds the desire of union with God.

Take as example a mother, ready to make any sacrifice to gain for her child the necessities of life, who yet entrusts it to others to be taken care of. Such a mother may be said to wish her child well, but has no union of heart with him, and therefore the first element of love is wanting. The mother who really loves her child is not only devoted

to him, but still more, she cannot bear to be separated from him; on the contrary, she wishes to have him constantly in her arms and press him to her heart.

But we may lay aside these examples of every-day life and draw others of a higher nature from the Gospels.

It is Peter, first and foremost, who loves Jesus more than the others. What is there remarkable in his love? First, a greater devotedness. He is the first to cast the net into the sea, to confess the Divinity of Jesus Christ, to draw his sword in His defence. But that is not all; he is also the most eager to remain united to his Divine Master. When Jesus appears walking on the water, it is Peter who says to him: "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee upon the waters," [1] and throws himself from the boat.

St. Paul, again, is celebrated among all others for his love of Jesus Christ; his devotion to his Divine Master was incomparable; his whole life was nothing but the realization of those words which Jesus spoke to him on the day of his conversion: "For I will shew him how great things he must

[1] Matth. 14: 28.

suffer for My name's sake."[1] His union with Jesus is no less admirable, for he could say with perfect truth: "For to me to live is Christ.[2] I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."[3]

So, then, to love God in charity does not mean only to wish for Him all that is good because He deserves it on account of His supreme excellence, but to strive also to be more and more united to Him in heart, as far as human weakness will allow, while we wait for the perfect union of Heaven, our true home.

But here a fundamental question arises.

What is this desire of union at which charity aims? There are two kinds of union. For instance, one mother keeps close to her invalid son in order to take care of him, to sympathize with his sufferings, to distract him—in a word, to no longer live but for him. This is the first kind of union.

Another mother, bowed by age, clings to her son who holds a high position so as to be supported by him in her old age. This is the second kind of union. Which of the two corresponds with charity? St. Thomas

[1] Acts. 9: 16. [2] Phil. 1: 21. [3] Gal. 2: 20.

answers: "Hope makes us strive after God as a possession which it wishes to gain, . . . but charity makes us really yearn for God by uniting our affection to Him, so that we no longer live for ourselves but for God."[1]

The union peculiar to charity is, then, that which consists in living only for God. I add that to do so is the source of the greatest joy that can be experienced either in heaven or on earth. We feel, indeed, a twofold need, and consequently a twofold happiness, that of giving and receiving.

There is a great pleasure, doubtless, in receiving, but that of giving is even greater: "It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than receive,"[2] says Our Lord.

This is clearly the case with parents who often experience more happiness in bequeathing a rich inheritance to their children than those in receiving it. It is the same with those men who have something heroic in their hearts, whose sole ambition is to devote themselves to a great cause without looking for reward.

Take a young man who has all that can be desired: wealth, pleasure, success, and

[1] 2^a 2^{ae}, *q.* 17, a. 6, ad. 3. [2] Acts. 20: 35.

yet who is not satisfied by all this worldly happiness. There is sadness in the depths of his soul and he enjoys no real happiness. And why—he receives much and gives little. But the Church is attacked and the Sovereign Pontiff Pius X appeals to generous souls to defend it. This spoiled child of fortune answers the call. Instead of the comforts of his mansion, he will only have those of the camp; instead of sumptuous fare, soldiers' rations; he will have to wait upon himself, instead of being waited upon; to risk his life instead of carefully guarding it for future enjoyment. And yet he is happy, for, instead of receiving much, he has begun, in his turn, to give much and it brings more joy to give than to receive.

Between the cause of God and even the noblest human cause there is a boundless distance. Yet if the great causes of this world can inspire us so profoundly that joy is found in the greatest sacrifice, what must be the joy of the soul that forgets itself for God's sake and lives only for Him?

Let us lift up our hearts, leave this earth and rise to heaven and there, higher than Angels, Archangels, Cherubim, and Seraphim,

let us contemplate in God the ideal of all bliss. Evidently the more we are like Him the happier we shall be. From the bosom of God issue waves of glory and happiness indescribable, over all the Angels and Saints. God gives them infinitely more than they can repay him for, and He is happy in so doing.

Let us be perfect as our Father who is in heaven, and give ourselves to Him without reserve, and our hearts will overflow with joy.

CHAPTER XII

CHARITY IS A LOVE NOT ONLY OF BENEVOLENCE BUT ALSO OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND THE JUST MAN

EVERY day we see instances of a servant's love for his master, a subject's for his king, but what we never see is friendship between a king and the lowest of his subjects; we never see a man of the people the friend of a prince. Evidently between such there is no equality of condition of life, which, up to a certain point, is one of the requisites of friendship.

So it seems impossible for a creature, however, perfect, to aspire to God's friendship, since there exists such an infinite gulf between the Creator and the creature.

Faith teaches us, however, that we are really God's friends, and that this marvellous truth, which the human intellect could not even conjecture, is brought about by means of the grace and charity with which the Holy Ghost fills our hearts.

Friendship is in fact a benevolent, mutual

and manifest love based on similarity, which includes equality in certain respects.

In the first place, it is a benevolent love, for the idea, friendship, implies a forgetfulness of self in the interests of one's friend. In a case where each is seeking his own advantage or pleasure, an interested union may exist, but not the true friendship under discussion here.

The benevolence must be reciprocal, for when one loves without being loved in return, love evidently exists, but not friendship.

And thirdly, the mutual benevolence must be shown. Two persons may feel an ardent affection, one for the other, but if each hides it from the other, they are on the road to becoming friends, but are not so yet.

Lastly, the mutually manifested benevolence must be based on a certain similarity, including equality of condition up to a certain point; since friendship demands that each should regard his friend as a second self. A learned man may be interested in an ignorant one, but the difference of mental culture prevents any friendship existing between them.

This being granted, it will readily be admitted that between God and the just man true friendship exists. First, because there is a mutual good will between them, God never ceasing to load us gratuitously with favors, both of the natural and supernatural order, and in his turn the just man, who is ready to sacrifice anything rather than commit a mortal sin, sacrifices himself gratuitously to God because He deserves it.

This benevolence is manifested on God's part by His telling man of His love, whether it be by means of Holy Writ, or of interior grace, and in his turn the just man tells God of his love in a thousand different ways.

And lastly, there is a sufficient likeness between God and man to warrant friendship. In fact by means of divine graces poured into our hearts by the Holy Ghost we become sharers in the Divine Nature. St. Peter assures us of this: "He has given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature."[1]

This first likeness between God and man,

[1] 2 Pet. 1: 4.

that effected by Divine grace, was necessary to make friendship a possibility, and it is a sufficient resemblance for the Angels have no other, and yet no one could refuse them the title of friends of God. Yet God's love for man has not seen fit to stop there, and to the first degree of likeness God willed to add a second. Leaving the glories of heaven, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us,"[1] so as to become like us.

At the time of the French Revolution, a very close friendship existed between two gentlemen. One emigrated and lost his property, the other remained in France and retained his. Twenty years later, they found themselves living in the same country, but in very different stations of life: one was rich, the other poor. Similarity having disappeared, friendship seemed impossible. But true love triumphs over all obstacles. From time to time, the millionaire unattended visited his friend's humble cottage and there, once more alike, they enjoyed without restraint the sweet pleasure of friendship.

The Divine Word did this for us by leaving the glories of heaven, hiding His Sovereign

[1] John 1: 14.

Majesty and coming to visit us in this land of exile. And here, made one of us, He tells us: "I will not call you servants . . . but I have called you friends."[1]

[1] John 15: 15.

CHAPTER XIII

CHARITY REQUIRES THAT WE LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS

It is possible to feel towards God a love of benevolence only, which does not extend so far as the preference of His interests to all else. This is the first stage of charity, but it is not sufficient to save the sinner nor to gain heaven for him without the additional help of the Sacrament of Penance. Charity, which demands that we should place God's interests before everything else, is of three degrees.

In the first degree, we regard what is really important to God's interests as of more weight than our own affairs, even than our own life. As God's interests have been deeply injured by mortal sin, this degree of charity obliges us to resolve to die rather than commit a single mortal sin and to say to ourselves: "My God, from love of Thee I will never commit another mortal sin." This is a necessary and sufficient means of salvation.

In the second degree, we consider the smallest of God's interests as more important than our own, even than our life, and since God's interests are injured to a greater or less extent by venial sin, we are obliged to make the resolution of dying rather than commit another venial sin. We say: "My God, from love of Thee, I will never again commit a venial sin." But this is not essential to salvation.

In the third degree, we look upon the least sign of God's will as of more importance than our own interests, even than our life. This is the highest perfection and is expressed by saying: "My God, from love of Thee, I wish to accomplish Thy slightest wish in all things."

Is it possible to continue in these degrees of pure love? If the question is of the first degree: "My God, from love of Thee, I will never commit a mortal sin," it is possible to remain in this degree all our lives. The remarkable privilege of the religious life is to make this degree not only possible, but easy.

If the second degree is meant: "My God, from love of Thee, I will never commit

another venial sin," again this degree may be maintained, provided deliberate venial sin be understood.

Lastly, as to semi-deliberate venial sins, it must be admitted that on earth the Blessed Virgin alone has been able to maintain this degree of charity.

Yet even if human weakness does not allow us always to maintain this third degree of pure love, it would be wrong to conclude that it is impossible to frequently rise to it. The thing is not only possible, but easy, to souls generous without reserve. The eagle soars high up into the air and keeps hovering there without difficulty, while other birds, who rise as high, fall back on account of the weakness of their wings. To be always soaring in the heights of perfect charity is impossible, but we may rise to such heights frequently and with ease, provided we have said once and for all in a burst of generosity: "My God, I belong wholly to Thee; I do not wish to live any longer but for Thee!" Such expressions of love may arise from our hearts at any hour, yet it must be admitted that prayer is a specially opportune moment, for then the soul loses sight of earth and

thinks only of God. Let us often repeat these words during prayer: "My God, from love of Thee, I will never sin again; from love of Thee I wish always and in all things to do Thy holy Will!"

CHAPTER XIV

HOW THE TWO KINDS OF LOVE—AFFECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE—SHOULD BE EXERCISED DURING PRAYER

PURE love of God is of two kinds: affective and effective. The former consists in praising God for His infinite glory, and in rejoicing at His perfections and boundless happiness, because He is infinitely worthy. The latter, which some prefer to call love of obedience, consists in fulfilling God's Will because He is infinitely worthy. Both these kinds of love should be exercised in Prayer.

Affective love is in itself the more perfect of the two, for it is that which Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and all the Angels and Saints practice unceasingly. But on earth the effective love is the more necessary, in accordance with Our Divine Master's teaching. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them: he it is that loveth me,"[1] and also: "If any man love me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him."[2]

[1] John 14: 21. [2] John 14: 21.

Without this love, salvation is impossible, so much so that if a man praised God only because He was worthy of such tribute, and had not the courage to give up mortal sin, he could not be saved.

Affective love may be made use of for three purposes, the most perfect being to praise God and rejoice at His glory and infinite happiness. In this act of praise, it is well for us to unite ourselves to the Blessed in Heaven, who day and night cry out unceasingly: "Holy holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and who is;"[1] or better still to unite ourselves to God Himself by saying with Holy Church: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end! Amen."

Nothing, after the Divine perfections, can procure so much glory for God as the Incarnation of the Word, and therefore, after the act of affective love of which mention has just been made, we can do nothing better than rejoice at the glory which accrues to God, from the life and death of Our Lord

[1] Apoc. 4: 8.

Jesus Christ. Here again it is fitting for us to unite ourselves to the Angels in Heaven, who find no greater pleasure, after that of praising God's infinite perfections, than that of honoring the wonders of the Incarnation, and they it was who sang: "Glory to God in the highest,"[1] above the Divine Infant's cradle.

Or again we may praise God for the glory which His works, both of the rational and irrational creation, reflect upon Him. Even the creatures deprived of intelligence praise God in their own way, as the prophet says: "The heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth the works of His hands."[2] And so we do well in joining our praise of the Creator to theirs. This Priests and Religious do every day when reciting the Divine Office at Lauds.

Effective love, too, may be exercised in three ways. First, in telling God over and over again that we wish to do in all things, even the most insignificant, what He wishes, because He deserves this from us.

This sincere wish of accomplishing God's Will, formed in course of prayer, is always

[1] Luke 2: 14. [2] Ps. 18: 2.

followed by generous acts in His service, for as St. Gregory says: "The proof of love is in the works, . . . love is never idle; where it exists it works great things, but when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist."[1]

Secondly, we may practise effective love by submitting to God's will, which is infinitely lovable, with regard to the present and future trials of life. Here, too, it is well to unite ourselves to Our Lord, Who during the dreadful sufferings of His Passion was filled with love and repeated His submission to His Father by saying: "Not my will but Thine be done;"[2] and also: "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"[3]

Finally, this love may be exercised by offering ourselves unreservedly as a holocaust to God's Majesty. Here we follow Our Lord's example when hanging on the cross, of Whom the Apostle said: "He hath delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness."[4]

[1] *Homil.* 3° *in Evang.*, Parisiis, 1571, t. 2, p. 303, 304.
[2] Luke 22: 42.
[3] John 18: 11.
[4] Eph. 5: 2.

CHAPTER XV

WE MUST CONSIDER GOD AS OUR SUPREME BENEFACTOR IN ORDER TO GAIN A LOVE OF HIM [1]

GRATITUDE is a virtue which bids us return benefit for benefit. Although essentially distinct from charity, it is of great assistance in arousing a love of God. What man is there, indeed, who, when he dwells upon God's love for us from all eternity, does not hear, deep down in his heart, a voice which says: "Love is repaid only by love; God has loved you without any thought of gain, and it is supremely right and just that you should love Him disinterestedly in return." This is the voice of gratitude. "Let us therefore love God," says St. John, "because God first hath loved us." [2]

But where are we to look for proofs of God's love towards us? No need to go far. All our surroundings, every part of ourselves

[1] This chapter is a development of the first three points of St. Ignatius' contemplation for obtaining Love.

[2] I John 4: 19.

says distinctly: "We are the result of God's love for you, return His love."

The firmament not only sings God's praise, but likewise proclaims His incomprehensible love for us. The stars say to me: God created us for you; do not be ungrateful, but love Him in return. The flowers and fruits urge me to love Thee, O my God, for they tell me that Thou madest them for love of me. Every part of my own being speaks to me and incites me to show my gratitude by loving God. Where was I a hundred years ago? I did not exist; and now I have a body capable of sensation, a mind endowed with memory, intelligence and will. What has effected these wonders? Thy love alone, O God, and since love claims love as its reward, I must love Thee disinterestedly in return.

Passing from the natural to the supernatural order, we find that there is God not satisfied with giving us His gifts but even gives us Himself, as far as lies in His power in accordance with the decrees of Divine Providence: "God," says St. Peter, "hath given us most great and precious promises that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine

Nature."[1] In creating us, He gives us the endowments belonging to human nature, and by raising us to the supernatural order, the gifts belonging to the Divine Nature. Thus I have really become the child of God, heir to His glory and boundless happiness—a mystery so sublime that the greatest intellects among the pagans could not even surmise it.

"What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?[2] I will reflect on myself," says St. Ignatius, "considering with much reason and justice what I ought, on my side, to offer and give to His divine Majesty: that is to say, everything that is mine, and myself with it, as one who makes an offering with much feeling: Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will, all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: To Thee, Lord, I return it! All is thine; dispose of it according to all Thy will. Give me Thy love, and grace; for this is enough for me."[3]

[1] 2 Pet. 1:4. [2] Ps. 115: 12.

[3] *Spiritual Exercises*, Contemplation for obtaining Love, Point 1.

If we consider God's love of us in a higher order, our gratitude ought evidently to be greater and our love in return more perfect. Love is testified by services rendered, especially when these kindly acts are personal. Argument is unnecessary to prove this. The poor shivering people to whom St. Wenceslaus used to carry wood at night, when the snow was falling fast, understood this truth instinctively. The presence of the King-Saint made the assistance offered infinitely more valuable. To them it was like a ray of sunshine which brings warmth and gladness.

Oh wonder! The King of Heaven, in whose presence the Seraphim shade their faces with their wings, is Himself present in all His gifts. He it is Who gives me the air which I breathe, the sun which lights and warms me, the flowers which delight me, the fish and birds as my food. Not only the voice of God's creatures urges me to love Him, but God Himself, Who says to me in all tenderness: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."[1]

Blessed indeed is he who hears these accents of divine love not only in those things which

[1] Jerem. 31: 3.

appeal to his nature, but even in suffering. Here he finds what will enable him to carry his cross generously, following in the footsteps of Our Lord along the path of suffering which leads to Heaven. Sometimes we hear of sick people obstinately refusing to take a disagreeable remedy until some one they love and respect hands the bitter medicine to them. Then they take it unhesitatingly and sometimes even gladly. In like manner if we see God's presence in sickness, humiliation, affliction of all kinds, it will be easy for us to say with Jesus in the garden: "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" [1]

The third degree of love, still more effective in awakening gratitude and arousing mutual love, goes so far as to work for the one whose love we would gain. To prove this would be superfluous, but the poor of Wartbourg understood it intuitively when the Duchess Elizabeth of Hungary went on her knees to wash their feet.

So God's love shines brighter than ever when in His supreme Majesty he condescends to work for me. Yes, truly, God works

[1] John 18: 11.

unceasingly for me by His coöperation in all the secondary causes. He is working for me by preserving to the stars in the heavens their light; by concurring in the development of flowers, fruits and birds. He is working for me in my soul, created to His own image and likeness, by making it a temple worthy of Himself, and by allowing it to enjoy those delights which are a foretaste of Heaven.

Now, it would seem that God's love for us could go no further; but such an idea is false, for love is shown more by suffering than by working for a person; and God has even suffered for us. How is this, if He is the All-happy? True, God in His Divine Nature cannot suffer, but He can take upon Himself the nature of His creatures, as He did in becoming man, and so become subject to pain. In the excess of His pure love He went further and died for us, sinners and enemies of God. "God commendeth his charity towards us because when as yet we were sinners according to the time, Christ died for us,"[1] says St. Paul. Here the voice of gratitude speaks louder than ever. "Love

[1] Rom. 5: 8.

calls for love and since God loved you well enough to die for you, love Him so well that you would die for Him."

The Saints answered this call with signal generosity. First, there are the words of the great Apostle of the nations: "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation." [1] Then there is St. Francis of Assisi, who says to Blessed Leo, his companion in religion: "Of all the graces which the Holy Ghost showers upon souls, the most perfect is that of overcoming oneself and of suffering willingly from love of God." [2]

In the same way St. Ignatius of Loyola says: "The greatest proof of love is to suffer for those we love and therefore to suffer for God is true joy, supreme happiness." [3]

St. Theresa's cry of love is well known: "Lord, to suffer or to die!" [4]

And lastly, for there must be a limit, Blessed Margaret Mary writes: "I wish to live only so as to have the joy of suffering; . . . all other subjects of conversation are

[1] 2 Cor. 7: 4.
[2] *Vie de Saint François d'Assise*, P. de Chérancé, c. 5.
[3] Bartoli, Bk. 1, c. 33.
[4] *Vie de Saint Thérèse par elle-même*, Paris, 1904, p. 530.

torture to me. No other grace can be compared to that of carrying the cross through love of, and in company with, Jesus Christ."[1]

Those who are ambitious to make rapid progress in love of God cannot all aspire to take rank with these heroic souls, but they should try to follow in their footsteps in proportion to the grace which is bestowed on them.

[1] *Vie et oeuvres*, Paray, 1876, Lettre 11.

CHAPTER XVI

TO OBTAIN THE LOVE OF GOD WE MUST REGARD HIM AS THE CREATOR AND SOVEREIGN LORD OF ALL THINGS

IN the Gospel Our Lord says: "'Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind;' this is the greatest and first Commandment."[1]

Since Our Divine Master teaches the great precept of love by placing before us the title of Creator and Sovereign Lord, clearly we should fulfill the divine command by considering this title. St. Ignatius develops this fundamental idea in his *Spiritual Exercises* in the following words: "I will look how all the good things and gifts descend from above, as my poor power from the supreme and infinite power from above; and so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc., as from the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters, etc."[2]

[1] Matth. 22: 37, 38.

[2] *Spiritual Exercise*, Contemplation for obtaining Love, Point 4.

History shows that exceptional power and genius in a conqueror have produced such love among his soldiers that they have laid down their lives for him, thinking him more than worthy of the sacrifice. But what are the powerful of earth compared to the Almighty Creator? Infinitely less than a drop of water compared to the sea, for by taking even a tiny drop of water from the ocean its volume is diminished, while all the earthly power bestowed by God at creation does not diminish His omnipotence in the slightest degree, but leaves it immutable, infinite and eternal. God our Creator is, then, infinitely worthy of our praise, adoration, service and love.

History again affords proof that the extraordinary justice of a St. Louis, a St. Henry, or a Charlemagne has made whole nations bless them. But what is the justice of a Saint, or that of all the men of noble life who have dwelt upon this earth, compared with the justice of the Creator? Thousands of times less than a tiny drop of water compared with the sea, for, when even the smallest of drops is subtracted from the volume of the sea, it is diminished, while

all the justice which has ever been displayed on earth and which was derived from God at the creation leaves Him the All-just, as He always was and will for ever and ever be. With much more reason, then, ought we to praise, bless, adore and serve God, our Creator, for as the All-just He is infinitely worthy of our praise.

And then, who is so hard-hearted as not to admire those souls full of heroic charity, goodness, compassion and mercy, who in every age have devoted themselves to consoling the desolate? Some have become slaves so as to deliver the captive, others have given their lives while nursing the plague-stricken, or died worn-out by tending the lepers; while still others have sold all they had and given their fortunes to the poor. Even the infidel and the unbeliever regard them as worthy of admiration and love. But what is the goodness, compassion or mercy of all these heroic souls in comparison to God the All-good, the All-compassionate and the All-merciful?—Nothing! And consequently God our Creator is immeasurably more worthy of admiration, veneration, devotion and love.

And now, in conclusion, let us consider the gifts and blessings which come to us from on high, their number, variety and beauty surpassing all thought. And yet if we consider them, not in themselves, but in comparison with their Creator, we are forced to say: "They are as if they had no being at all."[1] God indeed, in creating them remains unchangeable and infinite, as He was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

Let us, poor exiles on earth, join our voices with those of the saints who, once exiled, as we ourselves, lovingly praised their Creator by saying: "Let us sing a hymn to the Lord; O Lord great art Thou; let all Thy creatures serve Thee, because Thou hast spoken and they were made!"[2]

Then aided by this thought let us raise our thoughts to Heaven, uniting our voices to those of the Blessed, who cast their crowns before the throne and say: "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, because Thou hast created all things and for Thy will they were and have been created."[3]

[1] Is. 40: 17. [2] Judith 16: 15, 16, 17. [3] Apoc. 4: 11.

CHAPTER XVII

TO OBTAIN THE LOVE OF GOD WE MUST LOOK UPON GOD AS OUR BEST FRIEND

THE Holy Ghost urges us to this in the Canticle of Canticles, of which the Saints made such frequent use in prayer. There the love placed prominently before us is a mutual one: "My beloved to me, and I to him;" [1] so generous that it makes a gift of itself wholly and entirely; so tender that it melts at the sound of the lover's voice: "My soul melted when he spoke;" [2] so strong that it is constant unto death, ever persevering in spite of great tribulation; "For love is strong as death; . . . many waters cannot quench charity." [3]

Let us examine the essential characteristics of this incomparable Divine friendship. First it is true of all friendship that the happiness of our friend gives us as much pleasure as though it were our own, for among friends "everything is in common, both joy and sorrow," says the adage. But when there is

[1] Cant. 2: 16. [2] Cant. 5: 6. [3] Cant. 8: 6, 7.

question of God's friendship, that is not enough, for we must in addition possess such an excess of love that we prize and love God above all things.

This preëminent friendship between God and ourselves must result not only in our enjoying God's infinite perfection and happiness as if they were our own, but still further, in our finding more pleasure in them than in anything we possess ourselves. How much God loves those souls who are so filled with affection that they never weary of saying to Him: "O my God, my greatest happiness is to see Thee the possessor of all things and to know that Thy happiness is unlimited! I have said to the Lord: 'Thou art my God for Thou hast no need of my goods.'[1] This impossibility of wishing for Thee anything which Thou dost not clearly possess is my greatest joy." Such loving souls have already on earth a foretaste of Heaven, when the blessed rejoice infinitely more in God's happiness than in all the other indescribable delights by which they are surrounded.

The second characteristic of friendship is that it makes us become the champions

[1] Ps. 15: 2.

and consolers of our friend, if he is injured. Our Divine Master reminds us of this in the best known of the apparitions regarding His Sacred Heart. "Behold," he said to Blessed Margaret Mary, "this Heart, which has so loved men. It has spared nothing, but has spent itself in seeking to testify to men its love. And men have repaid me with ingratitude, irreverence and sacrilege. For this reason, I ask that the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi be set apart as a special feast in honor of My Heart."[1]

Thus God's friendship ought to result in our opposing the numerous attacks of His enemies by a boundless devotion, their blasphemies by praise, their sacrileges by respectful homage, the hatred of the impious by an abundant and tender love. All the Saints have felt this by instinct. Take as instance, from the Old Testament, the attitude of the great Judas Machabees and his heroic army: "The holy city and the temple were in danger. Their (the defenders) concern was less for their wives and children and for their brethren, kinsfolk; but their greatest

[1] *Vie et oeuvres de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie Alacoque*, Paray, 1876, t. 2, p. 414.

and principal fear was for the holiness of the temple." Take, under the Law of Love, St. Ignatius's words to the scholastics of Coïmbre: "Glance at the world to-day. Where is God's Majesty adored, His supreme Greatness respected? Where are His infinite Goodness and Patience recognized, His most holy Will accomplished? You will see, rather, to your great grief, in how many places His Holy Name is either not known or is despised and blasphemed. And when you have seen this, think of your vocation to restore, as far as possible, the honor of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, . . . at a time, too, when there are so few apostolic workers who seek not their own interests, but those of Jesus Christ."[1] In our own day, the insults offered to God's Divine Majesty have not become fewer: quite the contrary; and so, what an extensive field of reparation there is for His true friends!

The third characteristic of divine love is that it gives rise to the most perfect confidence, the confidence born of love. "All hope," says St. Thomas, "does not arise from charity, but only that perfect hope which

[1] *Lettres*, 1870, lettre 50, p. 218, 219.

trusts that it will receive a boon from God as from a friend."[1] Faith teaches us that the more we love God, the more He loves and protects us in return. In Holy Writ we find these words: "I love them that love me."[2] And so we have only to think of God's interests and trust Him with unshaken confidence.

One day when St. Ignatius was talking with Father Laynez, the celebrated theologian of the Council of Trent, he said to him: "What would you do, if God were to say to you: 'I will give you now immediately eternal happiness if you so wish,' and if at the same moment the thought passed through your mind that, by remaining on earth, you might be able to serve the Divine Majesty? 'I admit, Father,' answered Laynez, 'that without hesitation I should choose death on the spot so as to enjoy God's presence and secure my salvation.' 'For my part, I should certainly not do so,' replied the Saint, 'I should think only of God's interests and disregard my own and I do not think I should run any risk.'"[3]

[1] 2ª 2ª, q. 17, a. 8, ad. 2. [2] Prov. 8: 17.
[3] Bollandist, t. 34, p. 549, nos. 678, 679.

And the last characteristic of friendship is the communication of all things to one another. "The one who loves," says St. Ignatius, "gives and communicates to the beloved what he has or can share, and so, on the contrary, the beloved to the lover." [1]

What a noble thing this love is, with its cry penetrating God's heart, that piercing cry which only the Holy Ghost can inspire: "I to my beloved and my beloved to me." [2] Then God, whose heart is touched to the very depths, answers: "Thou hast wounded My heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded My heart, . . . turn away thy eyes from me, for they have made me flee away." [3]

The Church applies these words taken from the Canticle of Canticles to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose incomparable love touches God so deeply that heresies are clearly shown to be false, the projects of the impious brought to naught and the Church saved. Yet such is the limitless depth of God's great Goodness that He not only allows Himself to be touched and overcome by the

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Contemplation for obtaining love, Preamble.

[2] Cant. 6: 2.

[3] Cant. 4: 9, 6, 4.

wonderful love of Mary Immaculate, but even by that of Eve's unhappy children, whose defilement does not estrange Him, provided they give themselves unreservedly to Him.

This is shown in the lives of the Saints. There have always been some souls in Holy Church who were really friends of God, and who had much power with Him, as Moses, who appeased God's anger when He was about to destroy all those who adored the golden calf. "And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people."[1]

Such souls have been the strength, support and life of Christian society. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be blessed a thousand times over, for coming to bring and lavish upon us the sacred fire of God's friendship. "I came to cast fire upon the earth and what will I but that it be enkindled?"[2]

[1] Exod. 32: 14. [2] Luke 12: 49.

CHAPTER XVIII

TO GAIN THE LOVE OF GOD WE MUST CONSIDER HIM AS THE BEST OF FATHERS

No better proof of this is necessary than Our Lord's example. In the prayers recorded in the Gospel, Our Lord addresses God almost always as His Father. When about to work His greatest miracle, that of raising Lazarus to life, Jesus raised His eyes to Heaven and said: "Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard me." [1] Later on, at the Last Supper, on the eve of His death, He once more raised His eyes to Heaven and said: "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that thy Son may glorify Thee." [2] Afterwards, when He had betaken Himself to the Garden and was tortured by an agony worse than death, He said: "My Father, if it be possible, let this Chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." [3] And lastly Jesus expired on the Cross with these words on His lips: "Father, into thy hands

[1] John 11: 41. [2] John 17: 1. [3] Matth. 26: 39.

I commend my spirit."[1] And so, following the example of our Divine Model, we must form the habit, when praying, of thinking of God as our Father and loving Him as such.

To love God as our Father means, first, to delight in the infinite perfection of His paternity, which makes Him worthy of our love. Children generally begin by loving their parents from motives of self-interest, because they obtain help and protection from them. When reason develops, they understand the worth of the life which they have bestowed upon them and so a purer love arises for those to whom it is due. In other words, they love their parents because they deserve it. Here we have a picture, though a very imperfect one, of that love which we ought to feel towards God, our Father; and for much more reason.

The infinite perfection of the Divine Fatherhood includes two things: First, that almighty power necessary to form an immortal soul out of nothing, and then, an incomprehensible love which brought God to create for Himself beloved children with whom He might share the endless treasures

[1] Luke 23: 46.

of His happiness and glory. "Behold," says St. John, "what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called, and should be the sons of God!"[1] These two divine perfections are infinitely sufficient to win from us unlimited praise and a lasting desire to gain holiness so as to become the true children of such a Father.

And in the second place, to love God as our Father means to praise that perfect providence in virtue of which God foresees all our needs and that untiring solicitude which does not allow a single hair to fall from our head without His permission. Since God said, more than six thousand years ago: "Let the earth bring forth the green herb,"[2] what countless miracles have been wrought so that I might enjoy the sight and scent of the lily of the field! How many times the sun has had to warm the earth, the rain to fall from the clouds! How many seeds have had to be preserved from the bird's rapacity, how many roots protected from the worm! Who has worked all these marvels? Thy Providence, O My God, serving Thy love. My heart is moved and

[1] I John 3: 1. [2] Gen. 1: 11.

filled with admiration and praise, and in return I yield myself to Thee, O God; to Thee alone I give all my love.

And thirdly, to love God as our Father means to delight in the zeal which He continually displays in order to make us worthy children of such a Father. Indeed, if earthly fathers are justly praised for the care they take in correcting their children's faults, how much praise is merited by the ceaseless care which God takes for our sanctification! In order that a soul should attain holiness, God chooses truly such hidden, mysterious and varied means that no intelligence can understand them.

Sometimes, He makes sickness a means of sanctification through patience; or health, which allows of work to God's honor. At other times, He raises the soul by success; or humiliates it by failure, so as to raise it more later on. At another time He comforts the soul with indescribable spiritual delights; or tests it by the sufferings of a purgatory on earth. At one time, God draws near the soul so as to make it feel the sweetness of His presence, while at another He withdraws Himself so as to make it

understand the worth of that which it no longer possesses. Now, everything seems easy when God's grace is present; later on, the soul finds itself in a waterless desert, so that its generosity and pure love may be put to the test. And sometimes a storm is permitted so that the soul may realize its weakness, and afterwards the waves are calmed as by a word, so that the soul may recognize God's almighty power.

This perfect Wisdom, Power and Love, shown in the soul's sanctification, are indeed calculated to excite in us the love of God.

Fourthly, to love God as our Father means not only to work with all our strength for His greater glory, but also to desire with our whole being the possession of Heaven so as to glorify God there in an immeasurably more perfect way than is possible on earth. Is not a well-born son always anxious to procure his father's honor by every means in his power? As long as we are alive, we are always offending our Heavenly Father to a greater or less degree, and mixed with our praise there is always some self-love. Pure love makes us long to go to heaven, so as to live only for God

and to sing His praise with perfect purity of heart.

And finally, to love God as our Father means that such union exists between Him and ourselves that we can say to Him, as our Lord said: "Father, all my things are thine and thine are mine."[1] By means of this unrestricted filial love, we thus fill the office of providence to a whole country, even though we be beggars in this world's goods, for in our hands we hold the inexhaustible treasures of our Father Who is in heaven. A poor sick man in whom there is only a breath of life may thus be the prop of a whole town or sometimes a whole province. But let us make no mistake. Such power with God is the possession of those souls only who have surrendered themselves to Him so entirely that they can say with Jesus: "I do always the things that please him."[2] (My Father.)

[1] John 17: 10. [2] John 8: 29.

CHAPTER XIX

IN COURSE OF PRAYER WE SHOULD MAKE ACTS OF PURE LOVE, BENEVOLENCE, AND FRIENDSHIP NOT ONLY TOWARDS GOD IN HIS DIVINE NATURE, BUT ALSO TOWARDS THE WORD INCARNATE, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, AND ESPECIALLY TOWARDS JESUS CRUCIFIED

OUR Lord has said: "I am the way. No man cometh to the Father but by me;"[1] with the result that no one can attain the pure love of God, considered in His Divine Nature—in other words, no one can possess the essentials for an act of charity—unless he loves the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ Our Lord. This love of the Word Incarnate must have as its chief object the love of Jesus crucified. Indeed it is in His most holy Passion, more than anywhere else, that Jesus merited for us all grace and consequently the grace of charity. Rest assured that we shall never advance very far in the knowledge of God's love, unless we frequentlyfrepeat with the Apostle: "For I judged not myself to know anything

[1] John 14: 6.

among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."[1]

On the same subject, the words of St. Francis of Sales with which he closes his well-known Treatise on the Love of God, may be quoted: "In Heaven, the first ground on which the Blessed will be ravished in their love of God, will be His Divine Goodness known and appreciated in itself; and the second most powerful cause will be Our Saviour's death. In token of this, at the Transfiguration, which was a shadow of God's glory, Moses and Elias spoke with Our Lord of the excess which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But what excess did they mean unless that of love by which our Lover, Jesus Christ, was robbed of His life, that life might be given to us, His beloved? Theotimus, the mount of Calvary, is the mount of love. Any love which has not as its origin Our Lord's Passion is frivolous and dangerous. Unhappy a death without love of Christ, but unhappy a love without Our Saviour's death."

What does the practice of this holy and all sanctifying love necessitate?

[1] Cor. 2: 2.

First, that we love Jesus Christ Our Lord a thousand times more than ourselves, since the infinite dignity of His Person merits it. All the Saints are unanimous in affirming this; following St. Paul's example when he reproached the first Christians for not loving Jesus Christ purely for His own sake: "For all seek the things that are their own; not the things that are Jesus Christ's."[1]

Second, the pure love of Jesus Christ must result in our attaching ourselves to Him, not only with a view to the advantages of such a union, but, further still, so as to live only for Him.

To look for reward in following Our Saviour is without doubt, a good, in fact a very good thing, otherwise our Divine Master would not have said to the young man who wished to be perfect: "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me."[2] But this disposition is not that pure love of which we have been speaking, and whose formula is: "That they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto Him Who died for them and rose again."[3]

[1] Philipp 2: 21. [2] Matth. 19: 21. [3] 2 Cor. 5: 15.

The true friends of Jesus, those who remained faithful at the foot of the Cross, did not look for reward, but only wished to sympathize with Him in His sufferings. You, especially, O Holy Mary, His sweet and tender Mother, you remained on Calvary to be crucified there with your Son and pierced by the same lance. "O happy Mother," says St. Bernard, "after your Jesus had given up His spirit, the cruel lance which opened His side did not reach His soul but pierced yours, for His soul was no longer there, but yours could not be separated from His."[1]

Thirdly, the pure love which we feel towards Jesus Christ Our Lord must be a love of friendship, making all common between Him and us, the object in common being especially the sufferings of Jesus Crucified, so that we may say in all truth with St. Ignatius of Loyola: "I want and choose poverty with Christ poor rather than riches, opprobrium with Christ replete with it, rather than honors, and desire is to be rated as worthless and a fool for Christ, Who first

[1] *Sermo de 12 Stellis.*

was held as such, rather than for a wise or prudent man in this world."[1]

A thousand thanks to God's goodness from which we derive every perfect gift. In our time the friendship which unites souls intimately to Jesus Christ develops to a wonderful extent from devotion to the Sacred Heart, which blessed devotion in a special manner returns Jesus' love for love, seeking to bear the insults of which He is the object as though they were personal, and to accept the ingratitude with which certain souls treat Him as though it affected us.

Fourthly, we must love Jesus Christ Our Lord more than all else in the world, saying to Him over and over again: "O my Jesus, from love of Thee I will not sin again. O my Jesus, from love of Thee, I wish to fulfil Thy least wish, even though it be at the cost of my life."

And lastly, our love of Jesus Christ must be at once affective and effective.

"Affective love," says St. Ignatius, "consists in rejoicing and being glad intensely at the great glory and joy of Christ Our

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, 3rd Degree of Humility.

Lord."[1] This is the love which makes us repeat with the Angels and Saints: "The Lamb which was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and benediction!"[2]

Yet this is not enough, for affective love must in addition urge us to offer ourselves to Jesus Christ Our Lord to serve Him in life, in death, until our strength fails, and even unto martydom. The formula which St. Ignatius gives, is: "Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with thy favor and help . . . that I want and desire and it is my deliberate determination . . . to imitate Thee in bearing all injuries, and all poverty of spirit."[3] The fervent prayer which gushed from the heart and lips of St. Andrew is well known: "O Holy Cross, which didst receive beauty from supporting Our Saviour's body; O Cross, so long desired, so well-beloved, so eagerly sought for and at length prepared in accordance with my desires, take me away from mankind, bear me to my Master, so that He

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, 4 week, Contem. 1, Prel. 3.
[2] Apoc. 5: 12.
[3] *Spiritual Exercises*, The Kingdom of Christ Offering.

Who redeemed me by means of Thee may receive me by Thy means."[1]

In conclusion, this important remark must be made: that those souls who in the exercise of Divine love feel drawn to contemplate in Jesus Christ our Lord, especially the infinite perfections of His Divine Nature should yield to this attraction. On the other hand, there are souls who are drawn to the contemplation of the incomparable charms of His human nature. This is a less perfect course, for Our Lord tells us in the Gospel: "The Father is greater than I;"[2] which the Creed of St. Athanasius explains by the following passage: "Our Lord Jesus Christ is both God and Man, equal to the Father according to His Godhead; and less than the Father according to His manhood." Yet these souls, too, should follow their inclination, since the Holy Ghost is the master in meditation and He breathes where He wills.

As a rule, the Saints have been led by grace to consider in Jesus Christ, at one and the same time, the Divine and the human nature, and unless some special attrac-

[1] *Breviary*, 30 Nov., Noct. 2, Less. 6. [2] John 14: 28.

tion is felt, it is wise to imitate them. This was the course most frequently followed by St. Paul, as for example when he said: "For let this mind be in you, which was also in Jesus Christ: Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but debased himself taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men."[1] St. Ignatius almost always follows the same method in his *Spiritual Exercises*, as, for instance, when he remarks with regard to all the Contemplations of the Third Week: "I will consider how the Divinity hides Itself during Our Saviour's Passion—that is, how It could destroy Its enemies and does not, and how It leaves the most Sacred Humanity to suffer as cruelly."[1] And again, in the contemplation on the glorious mysteries, he says: "I will consider how the Divinity which seemed to hide Itself in the Passion, now appears and shows Itself so marvellously in the most holy Resurrection by Its true and most holy effects."[3]

[1] Philipp 2: 5, 6, 7.
[2] *Spiritual Exercises*, Week 3, Contemp. 1, Point 5.
[3] *Spiritual Exercises*, Week 4, Contemp. 1, Point 4.

St. Francis Xavier gives the following advice to souls already advanced in the interior life and who have begun to prove how sweet and lovable Our Lord is: "The following is an example of an act of love stripped of all self-love, which those may use to whom it appeals: 'O my God! it is neither the fear of Thy all-powerful hand which hurls the thunderbolt nor the horror of hell fire which everlastingly consumes the sinner, that makes me decide to serve Thee. Thou of Thyself, O God, dost induce me; Thou, O Jesus, pierced by a lance, dost attract me; Thy Cross and the Blood which flows from Thy wounds, O my Jesus, urges this course upon me! Were there no Hell to be feared, no future reward to be hoped for; yet, enraptured by Thy infinite perfections, O my Creator! worshipping Thy Divine Majesty, so sublime and so holy, and Thy ineffable Providence, I should still love Thee regardless of any reward for my love! O Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of the Virgin, full of gentleness, strength and innocence, Thou who didst deign to die for us, I would love Thee with that love which

Thou dost merit, without thought of reward.' "[1]

St Leonard of Port Maurice explains the whole of this doctrine in the following words: "If, my brethren, you wish to succeed in knowing a little about Our Lord, banish these two erroneous ideas from your mind: that, as regards His Divinity He is inferior, and as man equal, to His Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Most High, Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, true God and true man, is, as God, equal in all respects to His eternal Father, but as man, inferior. And further, each time you hear me use the name of Jesus, take care neither to separate the Divinity from the Humanity, nor the Humanity from the Divinity; neither to consider a person who is only God nor only Man. You must recognize in Him one only Person, both God and Man combined, of two natures, human and Divine. . . Although the Divine Nature—that is, the Divine Being—is different from the human nature, or human Being, yet the Divine and human Being

[1] St. Francis Xavier. *Règle de vie chretienne*, *Lettres*, traduction pages. Poussielgue, 1855, t. 1, p. 207.

united together, are but one and the same Jesus Christ, the august Mediator Who has reconciled God and man."[1]

[1] *De la personne de N.S. Jésus Christ.* Capême, t. 2, Sermon 28, 1[er]. point. Castermann, 1884, p. 294.

CHAPTER XX

THE SORROWING LOVE OF CONTRITION

"CONTRITION," says the Council of Trent, "is sorrow of the soul and hatred of the sin which has been committed, together with a firm purpose of never committing it again."[1] Contrition is perfect or imperfect, according as we hate the sin as being an injury to God or to ourselves.

The act of contrition is of much importance on prayer, for, as St. Augustine says, there never was and never will be in the Church a soul so pure as to possess the right of not weeping over its faults up to its very last breath.[2]

Without neglecting imperfect contrition, the souls who practice prayer should pay much more attention, to perfect contrition, that is, to pure love of God which leads us to His feet, there to weep over our transgressions. Thus we shall be imitating St. Peter, in whose heart Jesus enkindled a

[1] Sess. 14: cap. 4. [2] *Breviary*, 28 Aug., lesson 6.

great love, by asking him three times over if he loved Him, a love which made the Apostle weep bitterly until the end of his days. We shall also be imitating Mary Magdalen, whose ardent love gave her no rest until she had gone and cast herself at Our Saviour's feet and watered them with her tears.

We have seen how useful it is to consider God as our Sovereign Lord, our Benefactor, our Friend, and our Father, when seeking to gain a love of God, and, in like manner, that love of Jesus and especially Jesus Crucified, is the road leading to perfect charity.[1] Since perfect sorrow is born of pure love, it follows that these considerations are of equal utility in arousing the sorrowful love of contrition in our hearts. It was at the feet of God, the Sovereign Lord of all things, close to His Heart filled with infinite mercy, that David wept without ceasing for his sin. It was by going and throwing himself into his father's arms that the prodigal, the type and model of all penitent souls, found tears of sorrow, and with those tears, pardon for his sins.

[1] Above Chapters 15, 16, 17, 18.

It was at the sight of Jesus, covered with wounds, that St. Catharine of Genoa felt her heart pierced with love, and that sorrow, arising from this holy wound, made her say over and over again: "O love, I will never, never commit another sin!"

We shall do well to excite ourselves to this sorrowing love of contrition, first, when the soul, specially moved by the desire of being united to God, at the same time feels that its sins prevent this union. At such a time, the soul must pass through the purgatory of tears in order to complete its purification. And again, when meditating on the Passion, for it would indeed be intolerable to leave Our Lord alone to expiate our faults by unspeakable sufferings without uniting to them at least a heart broken by sorrow and tears. And lastly, when God bestows some unusual spiritual favor upon us and at the same time the Holy Ghost makes us understand how little we deserve it. Then we should arouse in our hearts a feeling of shame and sorrow, at the same time admiring the Divine Goodness whose only vengeance on our insults is a renewed stream of blessings.

CHAPTER XXI

ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

We have seen [1] that adoration is an act of the virtue of religion by which we confess God's infinite perfection and, in consequence, our absolute dependence. This, the essential preliminary of prayer, continues virtually as long as the exercise lasts, in the respectful attitude which must always be maintained. Yet that is not enough, and we must from time to time imitate the example of the Saints by formal acts of adoration during prayer. Indeed it is perfectly right and just that the rational creation should pay homage to its Creator by openly confessing His infinite perfection and humbly repeating with the seraphim: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of thy glory." [2]

Adoration belongs to the virtue of religion, yet in the case of souls who are in a constant state of intimacy with God, love most often combines with justice so as to make

[1] Part 2, ch. 3.

[2] *Preface of the Mass.*

such souls form acts of adoration. Indeed these souls, accustomed to love God for Himself, always feel anxious to offer Him every possible possession; and love to them is a weight which is constantly drawing them to this step. Adoration is one of these offerings, of such value that it may be made to God alone. This is understood instinctively by such souls, who exclaim: "My God, I adore Thee because I love Thee!"

With regard to thanksgiving, this is a very important act of prayer, not only because it is all just to thank God for the blessings which He has showered upon us, but because God usually grants new and abundant favors only to those who thank Him heartily for former ones. The one who would obtain the loaf of bread must thank the Divine Goodness with all his heart for the crumb which he has already received. The soul which wishes to drink deep draughts from the fountain of living water must return thanks for the tiny drop which fell from it. With those who dwell in a constant state of intimacy with God, pure love is almost always connected with thanksgiving. One manner of arousing gratitude has already

been pointed out,[1] and here we have a second. When a soul which lives only for God meditates on the blessings He has bestowed, it is arousing in the first place a feeling of gratitude. The soul does not stop here, but instinctively passes from the blessing to its cause, like a river to its source. This is the result not only of the desire for knowledge common to mankind, but also, and to a greater degree, of the constant love the soul feels for God, for as the Imitation rightly says: "The prudent lover does not think so much about the lover's gift as of the giver's love."[2] Then in presence of God's Goodness which seems a boundless ocean, the soul, transported with love and admiration, exclaims: "Thou art infinitely worthy of my grateful homage. I return Thee thanks on account of Thy great glory."[3]

There are two occasions upon which it is especially fitting to return thanks to God:

First, when God's Goodness showers spir-

[1] Part 2, ch. 15.
[2] Bk. 4, ch. 6.
[3] *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, said in the Mass.

itual joys upon us in a special way, we should pour out our thanks to Him for them, referring to Him all the glory and saying in company with Our Lady: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!"[1]

And secondly, when God is trying us. This is the moment to awaken our faith, and remind ourselves that trials are the greatest blessings that God can grant us upon this earth, for they are the most effectual means of obtaining glory in Heaven. Our Lord has called our attention to this in the words: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter into His glory?"[2] Thanksgiving, then, becomes a duty to every rational being, for it is just to thank God for such a favor.

But this is not enough for souls who are pierced with Divine love and who live only for God. Of themselves they rise to greater heights and thank God for these trials, which contribute more to His glory than anything else. There we have an act of purest love, but which requires great courage. In time of consolation it is easy

[1] Luke 1: 46, 47. [2] Luke 24: 26.

to say: "Glory to God in the highest; we return Thee thanks on account of Thy glory;" but in time of desolation and suffering it is very hard to find the strength necessary for a like outburst, which then becomes sublime.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW PRAYER, PROPERLY SO CALLED, OR PETITION, ENSURES SALVATION

PRAYER does not rank as high as charity, for it belongs only to the virtue of religion, a moral virtue. And yet prayer is the most important act in meditation, for it has the privilege of making salvation sure.

The Council of Trent expresses itself with regard to final perseverance in the following terms: "With regard to the gift of final perseverance—of which it is written: He who perseveres to the end shall be saved, a grace which cannot be obtained but from Him Who has both the power to strengthen those who remain firm and to restore those who have fallen—let no one promise himself anything for certain or absolutely sure."[1]

It is an article of faith that the grace of predestination to be saved cannot be obtained as the reward of any good deed, however heroic.

So, even if one had spent a hundred years

[1] *Sess.* 6, ch. 13.

in the desert, as St. Antony and St. Paul the Hermit, one would not have the right to say, "I have deserved a good death and I am sure of my salvation." In fact, a very sad story confirms this statement, that of James the Solitary, who, though looked upon as a Saint and working great miracles, fell into grievous sin when he was seventy years old.

Even though one had endured the torments of a St. Laurence or a St. Ignatius, or a St. Agatha or a St. Cecilia, one could not say, "I have purchased Heaven at the price of my courage and suffering," for the Apostle tells us: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us."[1]

In fact, of the forty soldiers of Sebaste, thirty-nine persevered and confessed their faith in spite of torment and are honored as Martyrs. The fortieth apostatized.[2]

The uncertainty of our salvation is clearly a terrifying truth, so terrifying, indeed, that it would be enough to lead to despair, had we not an anchor which never fails and to which our hope may be firmly attached,

[1] Rom. 8: 18. [2] *Breviary*, March 10.

the anchor of prayer. "The gift of perseverance," St. Augustine states, "may be obtained by humble prayer,"[1] and this statement of the great Doctor is supported by God's own word. Our Lord has taught nothing more clearly in the Gospels: "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you."[2] And again with an oath: "Amen, Amen, I say to you if you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it you."[3]

Uncertainty of salvation and infallibility of prayer are two complementary articles of faith. The second explains the first, which, alone, might lead us to despair.

From time to time one meets souls, who sincerely desire their salvation, but are constantly falling into the same faults and are thus tempted to lose confidence. They say: "In spite of all my efforts I cannot resist any longer; I give up trying to free myself from them." To such the Church answers by the weighty judgment of the Council of Trent: "God commands nothing

[1] *De dono persev.*, c. 6, Migne, t. 44, p. 999.
[2] Luke 11: 9.
[3] John 16: 23.

that is impossible; but, when giving commands, He warns us both to do what we can of ourselves and to make petition for that which we cannot do. He then comes to our assistance so that we may be able to do it."[1]

In other words, there are some easy things which we can do by the help of that grace which God refuses to none; others, more difficult, which we can do only with special help, and this help, by means of which everything becomes possible, will be grantep to us without fail if we pray.

We are, in the order of grace, as new born infants in the order of nature. A child a few days old could do nothing of himself to avert the dangers which threaten him, or preserve his life. Yet God has not deprived him of all help, for he can cry, and then his mother runs to protect and feed him. In the same way it is impossible for us to resist, by our strength alone, all the temptations of the devil, the world and the flesh, but it is possible to cry to God our Father in prayer and He always comes to our assistance to gain the victory for us.

[1] *Sess.* 6, c. 11.

In a word: we cannot save ourselves by our own direct efforts, but indirectly, by means of prayer which strengthens us, we can. Therefore there is no act made during prayer to which we should give more care and perseverance.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRAYER MUST BE HUMBLE, CONFIDENT AND PERSISTENT, IF IT IS, WITHOUT FAIL, TO SECURE SALVATION

By obliging us to pray in order to gain Heaven, God intends to make us recognize our misery, and to thoroughly convince us that the glory of our salvation in its fullest extent will accrue to Him throughout all eternity. He wishes that we should all be obliged to say with David: "The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever."[1] The whole of Scripture proves this, but I will cite as proof only the words of Our Lord to one of His disciples who said to Him: "Lord, teach us to pray." Our Lord answered: "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight and shall say to him: 'Friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine is come off his journey to me and I have not what to set before him.' And he from within should answer and say: 'Trouble me not, the door

[1] Ps. 88: 2.

is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.' Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you; Ask and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you."[1] And now, I ask: what is that man who asks for three loaves and obtains them, not because of his friendship but of his importunity, if not a suppliant? The word is that of David: "But I am a beggar and poor: the Lord is careful of me."[2] This word is used in the same way by St. Augustine: "When we pray, we are all God's suppliants; we stand before the gate of the great Father of mankind; nay, more, we prostrate ourselves before it moaning in supplication."[3]

Now, what is it which draws from the beggar that cry of distress which finally obtains its request?—the recognition of his misery.

[1] Luke 11: 5, 9. [2] Ps. 39: 18.
[3] *Serm.* 15, *De Verbis Domini.*

Why does the blind man of Jericho persist in crying out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,"[1] in spite of the efforts of the crowds who try to silence him? Because he knows from experience how unhappy is the man deprived of sight, and the knowledge of his misery makes him cry out regardless of the crowds. Why do the ten lepers so persistently beg to be cured? "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"[2] Because they see their flesh falling from their bones, and themselves cut off from the society of men. The knowledge of their terrible state makes them cry out until they obtain their cure.

It is the same thing with the spiritual suppliant: the knowledge of his misery, that is, humility, makes him pray until he is saved.

And besides, the facts speak for themselves. All the prayers praised by the Holy Ghost in the Old and New Testaments are marked by this characteristic, humility. For the Old Testament it is enough for me to recall Abraham's prayer: "I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes."[3]

[1] Luke 18: 39. [2] Luke 17: 13. [4] Gen. 18: 27.

Three prayers in the New Testament are specially commended, and of all three the principal characteristic is humility. The first is that of the Publican, who justified himself by striking his breast and saying: "O God be merciful to me a sinner!"[1] The second is that of the Good Thief who admitted with humility the justice of his punishment: "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done no evil."[2] The third prayer, which is infinitely superior to the others in its perfection, is that made by Our Lord in the Garden. The Apostle tells us that he "who in the days of his flesh with a strong cry and tears offering up prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save him from death, was heard for his reverence."[3]

In these examples there is conclusive evidence that humility is the first quality of prayer, which is unfailing in gaining salvation.

But this virtue is not enough, for to it must be added confidence. Holy Writ allows of no doubt on this point. "In thee, O

[1] Luke 18: 13. [2] Luke 23: 41. [3] Heb. 5: 7.

Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded,"[1] says the Prophet. And Our Lord confirms this with His supreme authority: "And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer believing, you shall receive." [2]

Besides, the necessity of confidence seems evident from its very nature. Prayer is the cry of the spiritual suppliant. Now, the knowledge of his misery is not enough to make the suppliant cry out, but in addition he must have the hope of being helped.

In cases of shipwreck, when the lifeboats have disappeared on the horizon, the unfortunate men left struggling in the waves, clutching mast or planks, cease shouting. Not that they feel their misfortune less, but because they have lost all hope of being saved. And to return to one of the previous examples, the blind man of Jericho would certainly have left off crying: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" if the Divine Master had gone on with the crowd and disappeared in the distance.

And lastly, the prayer must be persistent, as Our Lord clearly requires when He says: "We ought always to pray, and not to

[1] Ps. 30: 2. [2] Matth. 21: 22.

faint;"[1] and in the parable of the man asking for three loaves, He says: "Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you . . . he will give as many as he needeth."[2]

In prayer, we must always be as persistent as the woman of Canaan. She persevered in her request for her daughter's cure, in spite of Our Lord's first sharp answer: "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel." She still persisted, in spite of a second and apparently more hard-hearted reply: "It is not good to take the bread of the children and cast it to the dogs." She said: "Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters." And the persistence of this woman obtains the cure she asks. Our Lord confessed Himself conquered: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt."[3]

And so it will be with us. If until our last breath we persevere in begging for Heaven, with humility and confidence, we shall obtain it without fail.

[1] Luke 18: 8. [2] Luke 11: 8. [3] Matth. 15: 21–28.

CHAPTER XXIV

PRAYER FOR TEMPORAL FAVORS IS GOOD, BUT NOT INFALLIBLE

It cannot be doubted that such prayer is good, for God in the Old Testament praises and grants the petitions of those who in humility and confidence ask for health, deliverance from captivity, cessation of famine or war, and so on. In the Holy Gospel we see that Our Lord receives with kindness and mercy those sick people who beg to be cured. Finally, the Church orders special Masses to be celebrated to obtain the cessation of plagues.

But such prayer is not unfailing, as that is whose object is salvation and the graces appertaining to it. This is the common teaching of the Fathers of the Church. It will be enough to cite St. Augustine: "He who with faith begs from God the necessities of life, has his petition mercifully granted or mercifully refused, for the doctor knows better than the patient what is best suited to the sick man."[1]

[1] Apud S. Prosp., *Sent.* 212. Migne, t. 45, col. 1876.

This passage answers a very common complaint: I asked to be cured of a sickness, for success in an examination, or in business, and I was not heard. The divine Doctor knows better than you the remedy which is fit for your spiritual cure and the help which will best assist your onward journey towards heaven; and for this reason He has not heard your prayer. How many sick persons have gained sanctity through their sickness, who would have been lost for ever if they had enjoyed health! To how many young people has failure been the occasion of an open return to God, and sometimes even of leaving the world and leading a life entirely consecrated to God, when success would have meant loss of soul.

It is the same with temptation and long periods of spiritual dryness, which are such painful trials to souls who are truly seeking God. To them temptation is often useful, as it was to St. Paul, to keep them humble, and dryness of soul is, in most cases, the desert leading to the promised land of the delights which come from familiarity with God.

And yet Our Lord, it will be urged, promises without exception that every grace, even temporal, will be granted if there is perfect confidence.

The question is not that of ordinary confidence, which God refuses to none who pray, but of that extraordinary confidence which God grants to few. It is a feeling of certainity which the Holy Ghost places in the soul, but so absolute that the efficacy of prayer in obtaining temporal favors could not be doubted. The prayer will be granted, even if it needs a miracle. If a soul has received this grace by special favor, evidently that soul ought to correspond to the grace by praying with absolute confidence, But such cases are very rare.[1]

In a word: let us ask in our prayer for temporal favors, if we believe them useful for our sanctification, but let us ask with submission to God's holy Will. He knows better than we what is good for us; if we are not heard, we shall then be neither deceived nor discouraged.

[1] Suarez, *De Oratione*, L. 1, c. 2, 9; t. 14, p. 93, n. 9.

CHAPTER XXV

DIFFERENT WAYS OF PRAYING

PRAYER is the cry of the spiritual suppliant begging God for eternal happiness. It is, then, analogous with the prayers of those asking for temporal favors. Now these make their demands in four ways:

1. They ask for specified things, such as bread, clothes, shelter.

2. They do not ask for any particular thing, but only for help in general.

3. They add to their requests certain motives likely to gain the good-will of the wealthy man, such as his kindness, greatness of soul, pity.

And lastly, they do not formulate any request, but are satisfied with drawing attention to their miserable plight by showing their sores and rags.

Corresponding to these four ways of asking for temporal favors, there are four ways of begging for spiritual favors.

The first consists in asking God for par-

ticular graces, such as grace to overcome this fault, to attain that virtue, or even for temporal favors, provided, in this last instance, the soul is prepared to conform fully to the will of God, if He does not think fit to grant the petition.

The second way is to pray to God in a general manner, without asking for any specified thing, but entrusting it to His Fatherly Providence to give us what is necessary and suitable. It is thus that David prayed when he said: "I am needy and poor, O God help me!"[1] while St. Francis Xavier loved to often repeat the words: "Jesus, Son, of David, have mercy on me."[2]

This is a very good method of praying, for it is accompanied by complete resignation to the Divine Will and filial confidence in the goodness of God, our Father, Who knows best what is good for us. It is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Gospel, for has not Our Lord said: "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?"[3]

[1] Ps. 69: 6. [2] Luke 18: 38. [3] Luke 11: 13.

Nevertheless, it is not always possible to pray in this manner. There are some graces for which it is not sufficient to ask in general, but for which we must form a particular intention in our prayers. For instance, we have noticed that a certain fault causes the greater part of our falls; we must ask in a particular manner for the grace of overcoming it. A certain work has fallen to our charge; we ought not to pray only for good works in general, but also for this good work in particular. We are called to take part in a mission; we should not be satisfied with praying for sinners in general, but we should pray very specially for those sinners of whom we are the apostles.

Divine Wisdom has willed that the Priest himself should fix the intention for which he offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; it is equally the will of this same Divine Wisdom that in many cases we ourselves should fix the intention of our prayers.

In the third case, motives urging God to hear our prayers may be joined to our petition. Thus David said: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great

mercy;"[1] and again: "Have mercy on me according to Thy word."[2] This kind of prayer is very efficacious, as it pays homage to the Divine perfections.

If, now, you ask what motives it is specially suitable to make use of, Holy Writ gives you the desired information. There we see God's Goodness, Mercy, Omnipotence, Fidelity to His promises, and the infinite merits of Jesus Christ specially magnified. Our Divine Master, indeed, did not say: "If you ask the Father anything, He will give it to you;" but, "If you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it to you." It is true that to ask for graces pertaining to salvation is in itself to pray implicitly in the name of Jesus, which means Saviour, and that is enough to gain the petition, but it is better to make an explicit prayer in His Name. Such is the practice of Holy Mother Church, in adding to all liturgical prayers the words: "Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth God, world without end." Thus when we meditate on the Nativity, let us

[1] Ps. 50: 3. [2] Ps. 118: 58.

bring into prominence all that Our Saviour suffered in the Crib; if on the Passion, let us present to our Heavenly Father the torments of the Scourging, Crowning with thorns and Crucifixion, and so on.

The fourth manner of prayer consists in making no request, either general or particular, but in limiting oneself to exposing to God the needs of the soul. This reserve may be the outcome of humility. Poor shame-stricken mortals, we do not dare to raise our voice. Evidently this kind of prayer is very efficacious, for the humbler we are, the more we obtain from the Divine Goodness.

But this reserve may equally well be the outcome of a loving union with God, so intense that we consider our petitions as granted, even before we have put them into words. Does not a true friend guess and fulfil his friend's wishes, even before they are expressed? Martha and Mary did not ask Jesus for the restoration to health of their brother Lazarus, but thought it sufficient to send Him this message: "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick."[1]

[1] John 11: 3.

At the marriage feast of Cana, Our Lady made this simple statement to Jesus: "They have no wine."[2] So well did this loving Mother know her Son's heart that, having once brought to His notice the needs of the guests, she regarded her petition as already granted.

[1] John 2: 3.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH PETITION IS ESPECIALLY FITTING

There are four occasions upon which we ought to persist in petition during the time of prayer.

First, when we feel ourselves urged by the Holy Ghost to ask for some particular grace, this being really the usual sign that God intends to grant it. Why indeed should God incite us to prayer, if He does not wish to hear us?

In the second place, when we feel an unusual amount of spiritual consolation in our soul. This feeling of consolation notifies us that God is near, saying to us in the character of a friend and all-loving Father: "Make any request you wish and I will grant it." At such a moment it is expedient to profit of this special union with God, by asking Him for that which concerns His own glory and the good of souls.

There are some persons who, being quite overwhelmed with spiritual delights, give

themselves up entirely to the enjoyment of them. They do well to take pleasure in such pure joys, but they are wrong in confining themselves to the enjoyment of them. Doubtless, it is wise to delight in the consolation, since God sends it to nourish and strengthen us in order that we may serve Him more generously, but in addition we ought to turn such a moment, more favorable than any other, to account by praying for the Church and the Sovereign Pontiff who governs it, as also for Priests, Religious and apostolic workers. It is at this moment that we should beg the Author of all goodness to pour into our souls abundant graces for the great Catholic works, such as the propagation of the Faith, town and country missions, the Christian education of the young. It is the time to pray earnestly that God may be everywhere known, loved, served and glorified. Indeed, we can do nothing more agreeable to God than occupy ourselves with the interests of His Glory.

Oh, who can tell how much God loves, and what favors He showers upon the soul which petitions Him by tearful prayer

for the sanctification of His Name; in order words, that God may be more and more known, praised and honored throughout the whole earth! How dear that soul is to Him which, day and night, prays that justice may come and reign in the hearts of all, so that men may become more worthy of their Father Who is in heaven! Such prayer is perfect, for it rises to the point of the very purest love.

In the third place, it is expedient to make petition at times of exceptional desolation of soul. At such times, prayer is necessary to prevent our being overcome by fear, weariness, or sadness, or our giving way to despondency. Our Lord in the Garden will be our model, for with the sadness and agony of death upon Him "He prayed the longer." [1]

Lastly, we ought to pay particular attention to petition when we are about to undertake any important step to procure God's glory. Since the world was redeemed by the Cross, nothing of any note is done in God's service, unless many contradictions are experienced. Now, to overcome

[1] Luke 22: 43.

these difficulties, a powerful grace is needed, which will be granted only to those who pray. Is prayer then to be accompanied by consolation or desolation of spirit? That is God's secret; but this is certain, that we must pray, following Our Lord's example Who willed to prepare Himself by prayer for the supreme combat of His Passion.

In the ages of Faith, men recognized this. Theodosius, before the battle of Aquila, and Simon of Montfort before that of Muret, passed the night in prayer. Divine Wisdom thus ordained it, in order that "He who glorieth should glory in the Lord."[1]

[8] 1 Cor. 1: 31.

CHAPTER XXVII

OBLATION

The importance of oblation made in prayer arises from the fact that the entire surrender of ourselves to God is the perfection towards which we ought to strive during life, and above all, at the hour of death.

During our life, we can do nothing more excellent than to imitate Our Lord, when He offered Himself to His Father at the time of His birth into the world: "Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to Me. Then said I: Behold I come, that I should do Thy will, O God."[1] And when the end of our life has come, we cannot die in a more holy manner than by offering ourselves to God, following the example of Jesus, our Divine Saviour, Who completed His mortal life by offering Himself on the Cross to His heavenly Father, as "an oblation and sacrifice to God in an odor of sweetness."[2]

[1] Hebr. 10: 5, 9. [2] Eph. 5: 2.

There are two motives for our oblation, the motive of justice and the motive of love. It is supremely just, in the first place, that the creature should belong wholly and entirely to his Creator; and further, God in His infinite perfection is an infinitely worthy object of our soul's delight, so that we no longer belong to ourselves but to God.

The oblation born of love is the most perfect, but by itself it could not suffice. God, the Essence of justice, can only accept it if its foundation be the idea of His sovereign dominion, recognized and accepted by us.

This does not mean that a soul specially moved by the Holy Ghost towards the motive of love ought not to cling to this motive without caring about any other. But in the absence of any particular impulse of grace, we must not set aside the motive of justice as being less perfect. By making use of the two motives combined, we follow the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the most perfect offering that was ever made, He offered Himself to His Father not only through love but also through

a most perfect sense of obedience. St. Paul declares this when he says: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."[1] And again: "Whereas indeed He was the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."[2]

Really pious souls understand this intuitively and do not separate the motive of justice from that of love in their offering.

The offering which we make to God during prayer ought to be universal and unreserved. To give practical details: we ought first to offer to God all the actions of the day which is beginning, so that with a very pure intention and following Our Lord's example we may seek only God's glory and His most Holy Will.[3]

We should further make the sacrifice of our life in anticipation of the moment when God shall see fit to take it, and renew the offering of our vows. This is a universal practice among the Saints and fervent Religious.

In the third place, let us accept with resignation and love the various trials that

[1] Philipp 2: 8. [2] Hebr. 5: 8. [3] John 8: 15, 29.

divine Providence may send us, such as sickness, humiliation, some painful decision of obedience, etc. In other words, let us offer ourselves for immolation without complaint, after the example of Jesus Christ, of whom Isaias said: "He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not his mouth: He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and He shall not open his mouth."[1]

Finally, let us during prayer offer the resolutions particularly applicable here and now, supported with reasons, which we have spoken of. This is the time to adopt them definitely with the sanction of our will and to offer them to the divine Majesty for acceptance and confirmation.[2]

[1] Is. 53: 7.

[2] *Spiritual Exercises*, Epection, Method 1, Point 6.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE END OF THE MEDITATION

At the end of the meditation, we must stop our reflections, in order to give our attention to the affections, which we must bring ourselves to make as fervently as possible. The best acts of this final colloquy are those to which we feel ourselves impelled by grace. If more definiteness is desired, the common teaching of the Saints and the masters of the spiritual life brings into prominence three of these acts:

1. To return God thanks for the graces which He has bestowed on us during the meditation. At the beginning we asked Him for them, and it is most just to thank Him after having received them.

2. To offer Him our resolutions. The principal aim of all meditation is the offering made to God's Majesty of a life generously reformed with a view to increasing His glory. As our meditation is drawing

to a close, we must not forget the aim which we had in making it.

3. And lastly, to ask for grace to fulfil these resolutions. We cannot do so without help from on high, and this help is granted only to those who ask for it.

CHAPTER XXIX

REFLECTION

DURING annual retreats, reflection generally lasts a quarter of an hour.[1] At such times it comprises two things: the examination and recapitulation.[2]

We will speak first of the examination.

The examination should extend not only to the meditation but also to the preparation. So I will first put this question to myself: Did I attentively prepare, read or listen to the Points? Did I afterwards keep recollected? Did I briefly review the subject of meditation, after retiring, before going to sleep? Did I again think of it on waking up next morning, and dispel all other thoughts?

Then passing to the meditation itself: Did I make the three preliminary and essential acts seriously; namely, that of placing myself in the presence of God,

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Addit. 5.

[2] See Venerable Louis DaPonte, General preface to *Meditation on the Mysteries of Faith*, No. 8, the Examination of Prayer. Also Roothaan, *Method of Meditation*, Ch. 3.

adoring Him, begging the grace of the Holy Ghost? In the course of the meditation, did I banish distractions gently, but at the same time firmly? Did I exert my intellect, instead of remaining torpid? Did I make acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition, adoration, thanksgiving, petition and oblation fervently? Did I maintain a respectful attitude, both interiorly and exteriorly, with regard to the Divine Majesty? Did I finish with a fervent colloquy?

If the meditation has not been well made, I will repent and resolve to correct myself. If the opposite is true, I will return thanks to God for its success.[1]

The reflection is in the first place an examination, but it is likewise a recapitulation.

It is the time to review mentally the good impulses, holy inspirations, special lights, consolation and spiritual pleasures which it has pleased God to give me during prayer. I will return then quietly to the thoughts which made most impression on me, to the affections which touched me most deeply, so as to impress them better on my mind and enjoy them more fully. I will review

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Addit. 3.

the practical conclusions which I drew from them, so as to imprint them more deeply on my memory and in my will, and in this way ensure their execution.

It sometimes happens that what has been sought in vain during the meditation proper is found then—nameldey, votion. The dry soul could not form any holy desire or project during prayer, and now God Who has been touched by its perseverance and humble recognition of its helplessness, supplies in abundance all that has been wanting.

Outside annual retreats, a quarter of an hour cannot usually be given to the recollection and then the examination must prove sufficient.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TIME, DURATION, PLACE AND POSTURE MOST FITTING FOR MEDITATION

1. As to the time most suitable for prayer.

The morning and the evening are the best times for prayer, more especially the morning. The more recollected the soul the less occupied with externals, the more fervent the prayer. Now, in the morning, directly after one has risen, the day's occupation has not yet begun, and in the evening, after the last meal, all the work is over.

If prayer is made only once a day, the morning should be chosen.

2. As to the length of the prayer.

As a general rule, the Saints devoted their free time to it, but every soul cannot imitate this example. The following rule is applicable to all. For those who wish to make real progress in prayer, half an hour a day is not enough. At least an hour should be devoted to it, as is the rule in almost all religious communities, many

of whom devote an extra half hour at night, and some even a second hour.

All should keep to what is fixed, although a soul which is specially drawn by grace towards prayer may do more and devote more time to prayer with the permission of the Superiors, who should not hesitate to grant the permission, if the attraction is sincere and other work does not suffer.

3. As to the place suitable for prayer.

The place should be secluded, in accordance with the teaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret." [1] From which it follows that prayer should generally be made in the room or in church. The seclusion is greater in the room, and that is a precious advantage. Our Lord is present in the Church, and there the prayer is in common; both of which are advantages of another kind. If one cannot choose a place, as for example, when traveling, any place is suitable.

4. As to the position of the body during prayer.

[1] Matth. 6: 6.

The normal position is to kneel or stand when praying, following Our Lord's example. In most of the instances recorded in the Gospels, He stood when praying, but He knelt down in the Garden of Olives.

One may lie prostrate on the ground (face down) provided it is for a short time. This position, when maintained for some time, hinders prayer, as Cassian teaches, in accordance with the teaching of the Fathers of the Desert.

Here, too, Our Lord gives us the example, when, in the Garden, He threw Himself to the ground and afterwards continued His prayer on His knees.

Unless one is tired, one should not sit: and even in this case a careless posture should be avoided.

The sick may pray lying on their back, the eyes raised to heaven, for this is their natural position, but for those who have no sickness or serious disease, this position does not seem fitting.

PART III

Affective Prayer

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF AFFECTIVE PRAYER

Affective prayer is so called because in it under the influence of the grace of the Holy Ghost, the affections are made without the help of the reason or of lengthy reflections. After a short consideration, which sheds more light on a mystery than an hour of reasoning, the soul begins to be enkindled with the love of its Creator and Lord, and attains that state in which it no longer loves any created thing in itself, but only in the Creator of all things. Immediately, acts of adoration, praise, oblation, conformity, self-surrender, etc., . . . arise with remarkable ease, promptitude and pleasure, and in the heart generous resolutions are formed spontaneously. Such, in a few words, is the nature of affective prayer.

Here habit counts for much. A student who has devoted himself for years to the history of a certain century will, in a few seconds, grasp any question relating to it,

which a beginner would not seize in a week. In the same way, previous profound meditation on a mystery allows of its different wonders being revived in an instant. And where the will is concerned, evidently after much practice in acts of love, adoration, praise, oblation, conformity, and self-surrender, we finally succeed in making them more promptly and with less effort.

And yet their repetition is not enough, for in order to pass the boundary separating affective prayer from meditation, there must also be the special assistance of that grace which God grants in general only to those who have made real progress in self-denial and solid virtue. Although this grace is of a special nature, it does not belong to the extraordinary or mystic order, nor does it enable the soul to perform acts which are essentially new and which St. Bernard speaks of as being angelic rather than human.[1]

The only thing this grace allows is a new ease, pleasure and continuity in the repetition of those acts which have already been made.

[1] St. Bernard, *Sermon 52 on the Canticles.*

In order to understand this kind of prayer, instances may prove useful; so I will quote one or two.

I cast a glance on the Divine Child Jesus in the crib and rest content with this simple reflection: "The King of heaven is lying on a bed of straw through love of me." I soon feel myself stirred to love Him in return, and feelings of praise, adoration, thanksgiving, and oblation arise gently and sweetly in my soul; while later on, amid a feeling of heavenly peace, the ardent desire of following Our Lord more closely springs up spontaneously in my heart. What seemed disagreeable, now appears pleasant and easy, and, won over by the delights of love, I resolve to imitate my Divine Master by bearing poverty, humiliation and suffering of all kinds with Him. There we have affective prayer.

Let us take a second example, where the function of the intellect is more simplified, for it consists solely in placing oneself in the presence of God, our Supreme Good. By degrees, the soul soon succeeds in no longer loving any earthly created object for itself, but only in God, the Creator of

all things, and feels an interior joy attracting it to what is of Heaven. While enjoying delightful peace, the soul speaks to God as a child to his father, a pupil to his master, a friend to his friend, a vassal to his king, a poor man to a rich man, an ignorant to a learned man, and praises God because He is God, in other words, because He possesses all perfections in an infinite degree and suffices for Himself. Soon praise ceases to be sufficient to satisfy the soul, and a burning desire of distinguishing oneself in God's service arises spontaneously in the heart. The soul, otherwise feeble and full of fear, now is filled with vigor and courage; and having gained new power, it gives itself unreservedly to God and can say: "It is no longer I that live but God who liveth in me." This again is affective prayer.

In a third instance the praise offered by the heart is still more simple, for it consists in a single feeling repeated several times. Having reflected for a short time on this thought, which arises from faith, that "God always loves those that love Him, and takes them under His protection."[1] I feel

[1] Prov. 8: 17.

that there is an end to all reasoning and that I am inspired to say over and over again: "My God, for the future I wish to think only of Thy interests, and Thou wilt think of mine." As time goes on, far from feeling wearied by repeating these same words, I experience a growing ease and pleasure. This is an excellent affective prayer; for although it is necessary that the acts of the will be distinct and numerous, it is not imperative that they be varied.

This third method of affective prayer, which is simpler than the former ones, is fully justified by the example of the Saints. St. Augustine could not tire of repeating with indescribable love: "O Goodness, ever old and ever new!" St. Francis of Assisi spent a whole night in saying over and over again: "My Lord and my God!" St. Francis Xavier used to repeat for hours the words: "O most holy Trinity, O most holy Trinity!" But there is an example whose force infinitely surpasses that of all others: that of Our Lord in the Garden of Olives. There, in the most perfect prayer which was ever uttered, He repeated for more than an hour the words: "Father,

if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from me: but yet not my will but thine be done."[1]

Since then how many souls, tormented by interior struggles, have spent the whole time of prayer in repeating: "My God, Thy will, not mine, be done!" and also: "My Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."[2] In such expressions, they have gained an admirable conformity to God's good pleasure.

The doctrine which has just been explained is fully supported by the authority of many of those Saints who had much experience in this matter. St. Ignatius states his views in the following manner: "All meditation in which the intellect is exercised, tires the body. There are other kinds of meditation which are equally included in God's Providence, full of peace for the understanding, without work for the interior faculties of the soul, and which are made without any interior or physical effort. Such meditations do not tire the body but give it rest, except in the two following cases: first, when they make you forget to take your food; . . . secondly, when they deprive you of your necessary sleep."[3]

[1] Luke 22: 42. [2] Luke 23: 46. [3] *Lettres*, Lettre 9, p. 47.

St. Francis of Sales says: "It will sometimes happen to you, that immediately after the preparation, your affection will find itself quite inflamed in God. Then, Philotheus, you must give it rein, without trying to follow the method I have given you, for although the consideration should usually precede the affections and resolutions, if the Holy Ghost sends the affections before the consideration, you should not try to return to the consideration, which is only made to arouse the affection. . . . It is a general rule that the affections should never be checked, but always allowed liberty, when they arise."[1]

St. Theresa expresses herself in the following words: "St. Augustine tells us that having long sought God in his surroundings, he at last found Him in Himself. Examine this statement carefully, for it is extremely useful for a soul which experiences difficulty in keeping recollected, to understand a truth of this kind: to know that it is not necessary to try to raise itself to Heaven in order to hold converse with God, its Father, and to find in Him its

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote*, p. 3: c, 8: t. 3, p. 85.

happiness, nor to raise the voice to be heard. God is so close to us that He hears the least movement of our lips, their most secret word. We need no wings in our search for Him, but only a quiet place, and an examination of self, for it is there, within us, that He dwells. If His Majesty overawes us, let His Goodness reassure us. Let us speak to Him in great humility, of course, but still with great love, as children with their father, laying before Him in all confidence our wants, innumerating our troubles, begging for His assistance in them and, above all, recognizing that we do not deserve the name of His children."[1]

Souls which have received the grace of affective prayer still experience distractions, but they have two means of fighting against them. The first is by giving a greater part of the time to reflections. When the intellect is so occupied, it no longer feels urged to employ itself upon extraneous matter.

The second means is to come back quietly to the acts of the will. This is the method of resisting distractions which St. Francis

[1] *Chemin de la Perfection*, ch. 19, t. 3, p. 175.

of Sales advised St. Jane Francis de Chantal to adopt. "Avoid," he tells her, "overprofound exercise of the intellect, for it is injurious not only in other respects, but also to prayer. Always treat your subject, by means of affections as simply and as quietly as you can. The intellect is sure to sometimes travel beyond the subject, . . . and when you perceive this, you must be satisfied with returning to the simple acts of the will."[1]

Further, these souls must not imagine that, having once been raised to affective prayer, they will always be able to maintain themselves in it. Sometimes, the grace for this will be wanting and they must have recourse to meditation, in which reflections and affections have an almost equal share. Divine Wisdom has this end in view in withdrawing from them the pleasure and ease of affection, namely to make them realize by experience that these affections are a free gift from the Holy Ghost.

[1] *Lettre du* 16 *Janvier*, 1611, Migne, t. 5, p. 738.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVANTAGES AND DANGERS OF AFFECTIVE PRAYER

What has been said in the last chapter will serve to prove the excellence of affective prayer, yet it seems that if more detail were given to this important point, more light might be thrown upon it. Accordingly, I add that affective prayer offers five valuable advantages:

First, abundant spiritual consolation, from which results a great detachment from the vanities of the world. After drinking from a clear stream, the muddy water from tanks is unpalatable. In the same way, when the pure pleasure of affective prayer has been experienced, there only remains contempt for what the world holds dear: Riches, honor, intellectual and carnal pleasures.

A second advantage is that it gives us a high idea of the infinite and unrivalled perfection of God, Who alone of Himself is the source of all good. It is, doubtless,

possible to form an idea of the sweetness of a fruit by reading descriptions of it, but a much better idea of its flavor is gained by tasting it. In like manner a knowledge of God's infinite perfection may be obtained not only by reflecting on His various attributes, but also and more completely, by experiencing the matchless sweetness of His love. "In the love of God," says St. Bonaventure, "knowledge is connected with pleasure; the best way, indeed, to learn to know God is to experience the sweetness of His love. This way of gaining knowledge is much more perfect, elevated and pleasureable than to gain it by means of reason."[1] It is true that a knowledge of God is obtained to a certain extent in all spiritual consolation, but it is particularly the case in affective prayer, which begins, continues and finishes in pure love of God.

Another outcome of affective prayer is that it leads us more quickly and more perfectly to the aim of mental prayer, namely the soul's union with God. This union, indeed, is brought about by acts of the will, and especially by charity.

[1] *Sent.* 1: 3, dist. 35, a. 1, q. 2. Vivès, 1876, t. 5, p. 112, 5.

The fourth advantage is the wonderful fervor which is accorded in it to the soul for all things connected with God's service. "It is not of much account," says St. Augustine, "to be urged on by the will, if there is no equal impulse given by pleasure. And what is meant by an impulse of pleasure? Delight in the Lord and He will give thee the requests of thy heart.[1] . . . Can the senses of the body experience pleasure, while the mind is deprived of it? If the mind can experience no delight, what is meant by these words: The children of men shall put their trust under the covert of Thy wings. They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.[2] Give me one who loves and he will feel the truth of what I say. Give me one who longs for the fountain of that eternal Home, who hungers, who lives as a pilgrim in this solitude, who thirsts, who sighs for this living source, and he will understand what I say. But if I am speaking to a cold soul, my language is incomprehensible." [3]

[1] Ps. 36: 4. [2] Ps. 35: 8, 9.
[3] *Tract.* 26 *in Joann.*, post init.

St. Ignatius says with much the same meaning: "With this divine consolation all troubles are changed into joys, and all labor into rest. For one who journeys onward aided by this fervor, warmth and interior consolation, there is no burden, however great, which does not seem light. There is no penance, no kind of work, however difficult, but seems to Him excessively sweet." [1]

In speaking of this kind of consolation, St. John of the Cross writes as follows: "To this soul everything seems pleasant, for it tastes and relishes spiritual favors. There is not the shadow of difficulty in all that concerns God; . . . its happiness consists in spending long hours in prayer or perhaps even whole nights. Penance becomes its joy, fasting its happiness. Its consolation is the frequent reception of the Sacraments and prolonged draughts of the chalice of Divine consolation." [2]

The Imitation of Christ also describes the transport of love of which there is question here:

[1] *Lettre* 8, p. 41.

[2] *Nuit obscure*, 1, I, ch. 1, Oudin. 1880, t. 3, p. 242.

"Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing loftier, nothing fuller, nothing pleasanter, nothing richer or better in Heaven or on earth; because love is born of God and can find its rest in God alone, above all created things."

"He who loves truly, flies, runs and is always full of joy; he is free and will not be held back. He gives all for all, and has all in all, because he rests in God alone, far above all, from Whom all good springs and wells forth. He does not look for gifts but longs for the giver more than for all the gifts."

"Love knows no bounds but burns with boundless fervor, love feels no burden, counts no cost, longs to do even more than it is able for, and never pleads impossibility, because everything then seems lawful and possible. Hence a lover of God is strong enough for everything and carries out many things where he that has no love fails and falls to the ground." [1]

And lastly, the fifth advantage of affective prayer is that it is made without causing weariness. It thus affords men engaged in

[1] Bk. 4, Ch. 5.

apostolic work a pleasant and powerful method of continuous prayer, without, on the other hand, lessening their strength of body. This is what Blessed Peter Faber used to do when the Holy Ghost did not raise him to a higher degree of prayer and he thus drew down abundant grace on his numerous ministries. This kind of prayer also allows religious to remain constantly united to God during their annual retreat without endangering their health in the least.

The obvious conclusion of what has just been said is that this kind of prayer produces most precious spiritual fruits.

And yet, affective prayer is not free from danger, if it is made use of before the grace for this has been received, or if certain precautions, which will now be pointed out, are not taken.

These dangers are four in number:

1. Faults are corrected with difficulty; 2. Solid virtue is not acquired; 3. Human ideas are not banished with success, in order that divine ones may be entertained; 4. The will remains cold in its affections. Let us examine these points in turn.

1. A good way of freeing oneself from sins and earthly inclinations is to consider with attention the deformity of sin, its punishment both in this world and in the next, the barrier that it raises between God and the soul, the happiness of one who has broken the bonds of his passions and can cry out with the Prophet: "O Lord thou hast broken my bonds: I will sacrifice to thee the sacrifice of praise."[1] The soul which too soon omits reflection is deprived of this help and will never succeed in entirely freeing itself from its faults and evil inclinations.

2. Let us pass to the acquisition of virtue. In order to arrive at this end, what courage is found in the attentive consideration of the beauty virtue lends to the soul, of the indescribable reward which is prepared for it in Heaven, of the look of tenderness which it draws from God! What an impulse towards virtue may be drawn from prolonged meditation on the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose lovable example attracts and overcomes us! He who too soon ceases to reflect is deprived of this powerful aid and will

[1] Ps. 115: 16, 17.

not succeed in acquiring solid virtue to its fullest extent.

"Generally speaking," says St. Francis of Sales, "all nuns should be made to begin by the surest method of prayer and that which is calculated to reform the life and change the habits, namely, that method which we say has for its subject the mysteries of the Life and Death of Our Saviour, where one proceeds with more security. So we must quite simply attend to Our Master in order to learn what He wants us to do."[1]

3. In order to be perfect, one must lay aside human, to adopt Divine ideas, as God tells us in Isaias: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts."[2]

Now, this transformation is brought about by reflection, in which the understanding lays aside its human way of looking at things for God's. From a human standpoint, one says: Blessed are the rich, blessed are those who enjoy themselves, blessed are

[1] 18e *Entretion spirituel*, t. 6, p. 350,
[2] Is. 55: 8, 9.

those who have many friends. From the Divine standpoint, on the contrary, one says: Blessed are the poor, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake. It is by reflection that one is convinced of the falsity of the first, and the truth of the second, view. In the same way, by leisured consideration that poverty is the treasure with which heaven is bought, that it is poverty which detaches us from earth to unite us to God, little by little we succeed in leaving behind our worldly spirit and adopt the spirit of the Gospels. He who too soon omits reflection runs the risk of never acquiring the Divine way of looking at things and, consequently, of never realizing the Divine Master's injunction: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." [1]

4. And lastly, just as a brisk fire is obtained only if wood has been previously collected and piled up, so in the same way, the intellect must devote itself to reflection in order that fervent affections may arise in the heart. The will, indeed, is not usually

[1] Matth. 5: 48.

stirred to action except by acts of the intellect. So, to neglect reflection is to expose oneself to the risk of only tepid affections during prayer.

I know it is true that the breath of the Holy Ghost is more powerful in enkindling the heart with the fire of God's love than any number of considerations, but are we assured of having this special influence of grace? Illusions are possible and there lies the danger.

St. Francis of Sales on June 8th 1606, wrote to St. Jane Frances de Chantal, who was still in the world: "I have been thinking of what you write about Monsieur N. having advised you not to make any use of the imagination or understanding. . . If your will, without being forced, keeps on with its affections, there is no need to spend time over the considerations. But as this does not usually happen to us poor imperfect mortals, we must still have recourse to considerations for a while." [1]

I know, too, that once a soul has acquired the solid virtues of faith, hope, charity, etc., in an eminent degree, the slightest con-

[1] T. 13, p. 183, 184.

sideration is sufficient to enable it to make excellent acts of them. In an army where the veterans have been trained to bravery, their leader's slightest word causes more enthusiasm than a lengthy harangue among conscripts. In the same way, the soul which has attained a disdain for things transitory and formed the habit of living for God only, after a moment's reflection makes most perfect acts of hope, love, praise, adoration, and the rest. But are we quite sure that the required degree of solid virtue already exists in us? There again it is possible to be deluded.

The precautions, however, are not to be exaggerated, for that would be deplorable cowardice, producing the sad effect of depriving certain souls of graces very advantageous to themselves and their apostolic ardor.

In conclusion: When a soul has already made real progress in virtue and is so urged by grace that it finds in affective prayer an effective aid in increasing its disdain for all that is transitory and also its desire for spiritual blessings; when such a soul can gain from this kind of prayer a real enthusiasm for praising, honoring and serving God better;

in a word, for making progress in the love of God! it should be encouraged in the method it has chosen, as it is less tiring and, at the same time, more noble and more effective in producing the fruits of holiness.

CHAPTER III

HOW FAR MAY AFFECTIVE PRAYER BE SIMPLIFIED?

We have already seen that acts of the intellect may be so simplified that we may rest content with the simple thought that we are in the presence of God and that He is our only Good. As regards acts of the will, these should be increased in number and though each act should be distinct from the other, they need not differ in any other respect. They may be reduced to one form of expression, which we repeat with devotion and without haste, following the example of Our Lord in the Garden and that of several Saints.

May one go further and so restrain the reflections and affections that the soul maintains a certain loving watchfulness and attention to God, without, however, making any other act?

My answer is that such a method could not meet with approbation, for if indeed both the reflections and affections are sup-

pressed, there only remains a confused contemplation of God, sufficient to keep the soul gently in the Divine Presence but quite inadequate for its purification, adornment with virtue or union with God, unless distinct acts of the intellect and of the will, or at least some affections, are added. Let no one think that this confused but loving attention to God contains eminently the other distinct acts of the intelligence and the will. This simple contemplation of God exists in extraordinary prayer and replaces eminently the other acts, but this is not at all the case in ordinary prayer, of which we are speaking here.

Let us hear what St. Alphonsus Liguori says: "In contemplative repose, some mystics say that although this prayer is natural, yet the soul should refrain not only from meditation but also from acts of the will, such as acts of love, oblation, resignation, etc., . . . and only maintain a certain loving watchfulness and attention to God, without making any other act. But I cannot in any way approve of such dreaming."[1] Then to the objection that St. Francis of Sales advised

[1] *Homo apostolicus*, App. 1, n. 7.

St. Jane Frances de Chantal not to make any distinct acts during prayer, the holy Doctor answers in the following words: "It is true that St. Francis of Sales advised Blessed Jane Frances de Chantal not to continue repeating new acts in her prayer whenever she should feel united to God; but why? Because she had already arrived at the stage of passive contemplation."

To conclude: As long as one keeps within the limits of ordinary prayer, this simple, loving attention to God, even understood in its best sense, is nothing but a useful means of keeping gently in the presence of God. But this presence alone is not enough to make mental prayer, and if we rest satisfied with it, without adding reflections and separate affections, or at least affections, we shall be the victims of illusion and the course we have adopted will be both barren and dangerous.

CHAPTER IV

FREQUENT ELEVATION OF THE HEART TO GOD

THE hour's prayer in the morning is not enough to keep up our fervor, but must be followed by the raising of the soul to God, interior recollection, loving aspirations, and fervent ejaculations. Here are five proofs of this fundamental statement:

Meditation gives a fervent impulse, to which we should correspond by putting in practice what is distasteful to our nature. How are we to lighten this difficult task? The unction which softens all pain is obtained by raising the heart frequently to God.

Besides, a son who is really worthy of the name is not satisfied with seeing his father at meals taken with the rest of the family and the short time passed together afterwards, but profits, moreover, of the hundred opportunities offered during the day of showing his respect and love for his father. The soul which cultivates prayer and which limits itself to holding converse with God during the morning meditation and omits to speak

to Him during the day, will never attain familiarity with God.

Another effect of ejaculations is that they purify our intention in a wonderful way and so make our actions much more glorious in the sight of God and more meritorious in view of eternal life. What is meant by having a perfectly pure intention, if it is not practising what St. Paul says: "Therefore whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God."[1] This can be done by saying with sincerity at the beginning of each action: "My God, I offer Thee this for your greater glory." The merit thus gained in one day exceeds that which would otherwise be gained in a month.

Interior recollection produces a spiritual gladness, too, which makes us say with the Prophet: "I have run the way of thy commandments, when thou didst enlarge my heart."[2] The pure pleasures which flood the soul are drawn from God's bosom and our Lord's Sacred Wounds, and there we must go to seek them many times a day. "Just as the birds," says St. Francis of Sales, "have their nests in the trees in which they may

[1] I Cor. 10: 31. [2] Ps. 118: 32.

rest when they feel need, and the stags the bushes and thickets whither they can betake themselves for shelter, and enjoy the coolness of the shade; in the same way, Philothea, our hearts should choose some place each day, whether it be on the Mount of Calvary or the Wounds of Our Lord, or some other spot close to Him, to which we may make our retreat on all occasions, there to find relief and repose from worldly matters. . . . Remember, then, Philothea, always to make several acts of recollection in the secrecy of your heart, while bodily you are engaged in talk or business. This mental solitude need not be at all hindered by the numbers of those around you, for they do not surround your heart but your body; that is, if your heart dwells alone in the presence of God alone."[1] Again, if it is necessary for those who strive after perfection to raise their heart frequently to God, how much more necessary it is for the apostolic worker. His union with God, the Ocean of all good, ought to be so constant that a ceaseless stream of grace may flow from it to the souls entrusted to him. A

[1] *Vie dévote*, 2e p., ch. 12, t. 3, p. 92.

true apostle should be like those Angels who, though working for the good of their neighbor, never lose sight of their Father Who is in heaven. "I seemed indeed to eat and drink with you," said the Angel Raphael to Tobias, "but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men."[1] We, poor exiles on this earth, cannot, as the Angels do, contemplate the indescribable magnificence of the Divinity without our fervor flagging. Our imitation of these blessed Spirits must consist of the frequent raising of our heart to God, when occupied with what we have undertaken for His glory.

What has just been said is sufficient to show the supreme importance of raising the soul to God. The devil recognizes this and does all in his power to lessen our estimation of it. Since he has to do with pious souls, he tries to deceive them by a show of good. He represents to them these frequent aspirations as checking the enthusiasm which is indispensable in works of zeal, and proposes that they should replace such aspirations by a continuous union with God.

An insidious reasoning! Original sin is a

[1] Tob. 12: 19.

weight always dragging our soul down to the earth and we are forced to keep on raising it by means of heavenly aspirations, unless we would allow it to gradually become centered in things earthly. A habitual attention to God is not enough, according to the universal teaching of the Saints, confirmed by their example.

St. Ignatius lived in such perfect union with God that a heavenly light often shone from his face, as is recorded by St. Philip Neri and several other witnesses.[1] Yet he did not think himself dispensed from frequently raising his heart to God, for he was heard to repeat almost unceasingly: "What do I wish for, or what can I wish for outside of Thee, O my God?"[2]

St. Jane Frances de Chantal said in her deposition for the canonization of St. Francis of Sales: "His life was one continual prayer, for I can testify that he went about almost always wrapt in God."[3] It would seem that such perfect attention would have been enough to prevent his soul from ever descending to things earthly, but the saintly Doctor

[1] *Breviary*, July 31. [2] Bollandists, t. 34, p. 736, n. 476.
[3] *Oeuvres de sainte Chantal*, Plon, 1876, t. 3, p. 170.

thought otherwise, for the holy woman adds: "I asked this holy man if it was ever long before he turned his mind actually to God and his answer was: 'Sometimes about a quarter of an hour.'"

And, as a last instance, we have St. Theresa, who used to say to her spiritual daughters, even including those who had been favored with an extraordinary union with God: "Offer yourself to God fifty times a day and make the offering with great fervor and an eager longing to see Him in heaven."[1] That would be three offerings during one hour. The Saint used to say: "Throughout your life, let one of your exercises be the making of many acts of love, because they enkindle and touch the soul." [2]

The devil will also craftily suggest the following thought: Apostolic works need all a man's attention and make him forget to raise his heart often to God. The remedy is to be found in a pure intention, which consists in making a generous offering to God's Majesty of the work in hand two or three times a day. This is quite sufficient.

[1] *Avis à ses religieuses*, 30°, avis, t. 3, p. 582.
[2] *Ibid.*, 51°, avis, t. 3, p. 585.

Our Divine Master answers in the Gospel: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."[1] Love God as did the Saints who have converted the world and even amidst the most engrossing occupations fervent prayers will of their own accord come to your lips. St. Francis Xavier had such a habit of making fervent aspirations that he was heard to cry even during his sleep: "O good Jesus! Jesus my Creator! O God of my heart and life of my soul!"[2] Those apostolic workers who are prompted by pure love of God and sincere zeal for souls instinctively interrupt their most absorbing occupations to make like aspirations.

On such a serious point, however, it is most important to avoid exaggeration. Dryness arises in raising the heart to God as well as in the morning meditation.

The soul feels sad, lukewarm, inert, hopeless and as if cut off from its Creator. Aspirations arise from the heart with difficulty and only by force of will. It even seems as if they only come from the lips. What is

[1] Matth. 12: 34.

[2] Lettre du Vénérable P. Carafe, *sur l'esprit primitif*, Lyon, 1878, p. 292.

to be done in order to remain faithful in spite of such great obstacles? Here are two means:

1. To encourage oneself by the double thought that the merit is by so much the greater as the work is more trying, and that such perseverance makes great strides towards that indescribable peace which comes from familiarity with God.

2. To have recourse to some device or other, of which the best known are: To profit by the sound of the bell, changes of occupation, the beginning and end of our daily actions, etc. . . .

Little by little, the habit is formed and finally what once required constant watchfulness and painful efforts is done spontaneously and with pleasure.

PART IV

Difficulties in Prayer

CHAPTER I

FIRST DIFFICULTY: DISTRACTIONS

THE first and most important point is not to be astonished at distractions. Since the earth has been cursed, it must produce thorns and briars; while our soul, stained by original sin, must without fail be tested by distractions. We must avoid weakness, and, on the other hand, too great vehemence in the struggle we shall be called upon to make against them. These distractions must doubtless be repulsed with courage and perseverance, for to seek to banish them in a spiritless manner is to take back half of the offering made to God's Majesty, but the effort should not be violent, or impatient, for it is not so much a work of strength as of grace and humility. To quietly shun the distraction and again direct one's attention to the subject of meditation, is enough, while from time to time one might also repeat with humility some such words as: "You see,

my Lord, what I am. From such barren and parched earth what can be expected, except thorns and briars?"

This is the general method to adopt, but there is one case where it is better to fight these distractions down, by scornfully ignoring them, and that is when God allows the devil to annoy us without ceasing and without our being able to get rid of him. Then it is well to remember that, according to the metaphor made use of by St. Augustine, the devil is like a chained up dog, who can bark but not bite. When a chained dog cannot be made to leave off barking, the wisest plan is to continue one's conversation all the same and to ignore his barking. Let us ignore the devil's persistent cry and continue to speak with God in acts of faith, hope, charity, adoration, petition, and the rest. Even in this case such acts are possible. Then let us commend the rest to Providence, for the infernal dragon will withdraw when God sees fit.

CHAPTER II

SECOND DIFFICULTY: DRYNESS OF SOUL

DRYNESS of soul is the want of light in the intellect and fervor in the will. The soul is then "without hope, without love, and when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, as it were, separated from his Creator and Lord." [1]

The first thing to do is to earnestly seek the cause of this spiritual dryness. Does it arise from tepidity, or is it a means used by the Holy Ghost to purify the soul and prepare it for perfect familiarity with God in prayer?

If we discover any signs of tepidity, we must correct them.

If, on the other hand, this dryness forms part of the adorable plans of Providence, if it is the means which God sees fit to employ for the purification and sanctification of our soul, these three thoughts may enlighten and encourage us. Such dryness of soul is

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Discernment of Spirits, Week 1, Rule 4.

at one and the same time a purgatory, a lesson and a trial.[1]

In the first place, a purgatory—a purgatory of interior suffering where the soul is purified before being admitted to a union with God through prayer, as the just are cleansed in the Purgatory of fire before being admitted to the perfect union of Heaven. Only those souls, indeed, who are free from sin and the punishment due to sin can see God, whether in this world or in the other, for it is written: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." [2]

Since the soul which experiences dryness is in a purgatory, those holy souls which are being purified in the other life should be its models and it should strive after a humble and perfect resignation to God's will by saying: "The interior suffering which I experience is the just punishment of my sins. My God, Thy most holy Will be done!"

In the second place, dryness is a lesson in humility, necessary for us that we may understand from experience that light and fervor are gifts which God bestows on us

[1] *Ibid,* Rule 9.

[2] Matth. 5: 8.

without any desert on our part, and that we may thus be helped to glorify Him and Him alone for these gifts. By the light of faith, we all know that we could not even pronounce the name of Jesus with fervor without the help of the Holy Ghost,[1] and our certainty on this point exceeds all natural certainty. But in the general order of Providence, this certainty arising from faith is not enough to arouse in us a profound humility, the foundation of all grace in prayer. So the knowledge of our weakness, as gained from experience, is indispensable. St. Paul, through his matchless faith, knew that he could do nothing of himself in the order of grace, yet this was not enough and he had to learn it through the humiliating sting of the flesh. "And lest the greatness of the revelations should lift me up, there was given me a sting in the flesh, an angel of satan to buffet me." [2]

In the third place, dryness is a trial in which we must triumph in order to arrive at a union with God in prayer. God usually grants a virtue in a high degree only to those who have gained a brilliant victory over the

[1] 1 Cor. 12: 3. [2] 2 Cor. 12: 7.

corresponding vice. There are wonderful exceptions, as in the case of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, who received the gift of chastity in all its perfection without having fought for it; but such cases are rare. In like manner, God grants holy familiarity with Himself in prayer only to those souls who have bravely conquered the dryness of soul which is opposed to it.

When the Holy Ghost makes His breath felt, the soul has only to spread its wings to glide along without effort or labor. The mind is filled with holy thoughts, the understanding becomes effective; the affections, fervent; the petitions, full of confidence. All that has to be done then is to let oneself go, filled with humility and gratitude. But when God's breath ceases, then all is changed. The oars must be taken up, and this entails work, at once hard, distasteful and fatiguing. The soul must use all its powers to find even a feeble light—enough, however, to guide it—and a moderate fervor, causing it to direct its steps toward union with God, without its being conscious of the fact. This is the hard and laborious work which precedes rest.

There are two kinds of spiritual aridity, the one continuous, where not one drop of dew falls from heaven for weeks and even months; the other, intermittent, where consolation and desolation succeed one another by turns. What has been said applies to both, and it only remains to notice some points characteristic of each separately.

The following four counsels of St. Ignatius apply to intermittent aridity only, as that is the more usual form:

1. In time of desolation, the soul should not only possess itself in patience, but should also take courage in the thought that consolation will soon return.

2. In time of consolation, the soul should not only give itself up to holy affections, which are pleasing and easy, but should also think of how it will act in time of desolation, and store up courage for the time of trial.

3. When experiencing consolation, the soul should make a serious effort to form practical resolutions, but when desolate its only care should be to remain faithful to the resolutions already formed; the reason being that, as the soul is then in darkness, it cannot choose a road leading to a happy end.

4. A very good method for hastening the return of consolation is to give a little more time to prayer, and to apply oneself more to the practice of penance.[1]

The two following counsels, on the contrary, are connected only with spiritual dryness of long duration:

1. It is no longer a case of giving more time to prayer nor of doing more corporal penance so as to obtain the speedy return of consolation—for that is useless; but we must remain faithful to what we have been in the habit of doing. This needs great courage.

2. The soul must call upon its generosity so as to fully submit to God's holy Will and to accept the trial for as long as God sees fit. Those souls who persevere arrive at a happy haven where they enjoy at least perfect peace and the happiness of living only for God. Alas! many give way under the trial and never succeed in gaining familiarity with God.

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Discernment of Spirits, Week 1, Rules 5, 6, 8, 10.

CHAPTER III

THIRD DIFFICULTY: WEARINESS

WEARINESS arises from a distaste for prayer. When we have to force ourselves to pray, the time seems long and we give it up without regret. Here we have a method for conquering these feelings. First, we must remember what was said at the beginning of this work, that we must not have recourse to prayer for the sake of finding in it spiritual delight, but so as to please God. This purity of intention will be the best means of avoiding deception, one of the chief causes of the feeling of weariness.

Then we must absolutely reject the thought that in time of desolation we are losing our time by praying, for nothing is more untrue. God, "Who never forgets our efforts,"[1] but rewards us in proportion to our faithfulness in His service, cannot fail to enrich us with numerous merits, if we persevere in spite of dryness of soul. Let us not forget that

[1] Heb. 6: 10.

true and consoling thought of St. Ignatius: "As, in the time of consolation, it is easy and not irksome to be in contemplation the whole hour, as it is very hard in the time of desolation to fill it out." [1]

Besides, the very fact of our keeping an hour in God's company in prayer must necessarily make us better. If by frequenting the society of criminals we become steeped in vice, and by frequenting that of the virtuous we ourselves gain virtue; in the same way, by being continually taken up with God's society, we shall become Divine. We must impress this well on our mind, that our prayer has been fruitful when we can make the double statement: I remained in the presence of God and banished all wilful distractions, and in addition, from time to time I made acts of faith, hope, charity, petition, etc. . . . No matter if these acts, which were nothing more than vocal prayers, seemed to come only from the lips.

Finally, we must go to prayer as though to a place of rest. Where indeed can a son better forget his weariness than in his

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Annot. 13.

father's house, in familiar converse with his father?

Let none say that this rest, which is possible in spiritual consolation, is no longer so in desolation. There are two kinds of rest, that of the laborer in the fields, who sits down on the grass beside a cool stream in the shade, and that of the miner, who stretches himself on a heap of coal at the bottom of the mine. These two forms of rest are certainly very different, and yet the miner and field-laborer impatiently await the hour of midday to cease work.

So it is in prayer. In time of consolation we must take our rest in prayer with a feeling of spiritual joy; in the hour of desolation, we should have recourse to prayer so as to find rest in the thought that God, the very best of Fathers, is there awaiting us, and in compliance with the Divine Will, infinitely just and holy and worthy of love.

If we were careful to awaken in our hearts these sweet and comforting thoughts, when we turn all desolate, to prayer, we should say without effort when about to begin: "This is my place of rest."

At times, disease, fatigue, the privation

cf all sensible grace and the temptation of the devil so weaken the soul that it is incapable not only of reflection but even of clearly formulating the acts of faith, hope, charity, petition, etc., of which we have just spoken. But that soul can always go to take rest at the feet of God, its most faithful Friend, its most tender Father, and it can always raise its eyes to the Tabernacle and say: " O Jesus, Thou knowest that I love Thee, I resign myself to Thee."

Such a prayer, made in these circumstances, is excellent. St. Theresa thus reports what happened to her on the day of the foundation of St. Joseph of Avila: " Three of four hours after the ceremony, the devil engaged me in the interior struggle of which I am going to speak. He put the thought into my head that perhaps I had offended God in what I had said and had been wanting in obedience. . . . All virtues, even that of faith, having ceased to operate in my soul, I had not strength enough to make even one act. . . . Seeing myself in this state, I turned my steps to the Blessed Sacrament, so as at least to raise my eyes to the Tabernacle, since the prayer was an impossibility

to me. . . . Our Lord did not wish to leave His poor servant long in suffering and was faithful in bringing help to me in this trial, as He had in all the others."[1]

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 36. Bouix, 1859, pp. 484, 485, 486.

CHAPTER IV

FOURTH DIFFICULTY: DISCOURAGEMENT AND WANT OF PERSEVERANCE

THERE are three very useful thoughts to help us overcome this difficulty:

1. If perseverence in asking for the grace of salvation is necessary even up to the moment of death, perseverance in prayer is no less indispensable in gaining holiness and obtaining a high place in the abode of glory.

2. Prayer is not the work of nature but of grace, and in consequence we must persevere in it even if we are not aware of any tangible progress. When literature, mathematics or art has been studied for some length of time without any real progress being made, the only reasonable course is to abandon the effort. Those are works of nature. It is not the same with prayer. Even if we had made use of the devices suggested and have not succeeded, we must not allow ourselves to give it up. Prayer is not a work of nature,

but a work of grace, and so we must always persevere, while acknowledging our weakness and trusting to God's goodness. He will make the task less difficult in His own good time.

3. The Holy Ghost sometimes delays for a while before visiting the soul in prayer. Alas! experience proves that many souls end by losing courage, with the result that they pray only as a formality and never receive the visit of the Holy Ghost. How sad it is to see brave soldiers who have made their way victoriously through several of the enemies' lines, allowing themselves to be overcome in the last fight! A certain soul had to persevere during ten years of spiritual dryness before drinking of the source of living water. After eight years it ceases to make any effort and so never arrives at a union with God.

Let the soul which is tempted to give up, take courage in the thought that if the Holy Ghost comes at the eleventh hour, it will be able to do as much in the one hour which is left as others who received the visit at the very beginning will have done in their twelve. And if, as rarely happens, the Holy

Ghost never visits it while on earth, there is this spiritual consolation that the soul which generously perseveres loses nothing, for at death it will receive in an instant of time the whole reward of its labors.

CHAPTER V

FIFTH DIFFICULTY: TO LEARN HOW TO MEDITATE

Many souls which possess great goodwill retreat at the fear they feel of never succeeding in meditating. They thus deprive themselves of a very powerful means of sanctification. These needless fears must be banished, for the devil is at the bottom of them.

In the religious life, in order to learn to meditate, it is enough to follow submissively the Master of Novices' teaching. In the secular life, the best means is to pass some days in a house where retreats are given, so as to be able to devote oneself to the study of prayer. But all pious people have not sufficient leisure to allow of this. I hope to convince such that they can, even without this help, learn to meditate.

In order to avoid hurrying the work—a course which will cause fatigue without producing any results—it is necessary to advance gradually and by several stages, of which I will mention three:

1. *Preliminary reading.* The first thing to do is to convince oneself of the necessity of mental prayer for attaining to a union with God, the source of all good. As long as the soul does not hold this spiritual exercise in high esteem, it will not have the courage to overcome the difficulties which will arise sooner or later. The usual means of understanding the great value of prayer is to read books on this subject; the first part of this work was devoted to it. Conviction might be sought equally well in the beautiful writings of St. Francis of Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori, Ven. Louis Da Ponte, Ven. Louis of Grenada, Rodriguez, etc.

But that is not all. The two principal acts of meditation are love of God and prayer. To meditate with good results, the following thoughts must become familiar: That when prayer is made with humility, confidence and perseverance, it is sure to be heard; that to love God is to wish for Him every possible good, because He is infinitely worthy; that God is really our Friend and most tender Father. These ideas only find their way into the depths of the soul very gradually, so that they must be re-read

several times. A large number of chapters have been devoted to this point in the second part of this work, but light may be sought equally well from the excellent books which were mentioned above.

And lastly, there is a third subject about which we must read; that which is concerned with the three acts which should be made at the beginning of all mental prayer: the placing of oneself in the presence of God, adoration, and petition for the grace of the Holy Ghost. By means of reading, we must succeed in saying instinctively when about to pray: I am going to the place of my rest, where I shall find the best of Fathers, Who will descend from heaven and stoop down towards me in all familiarity so as to cure my infirmities, enrich me with gifts and embrace me in His love. The first three chapters of Part 2 were devoted to this point.

2. *Meditative reading.* First a book of meditations must be chosen at once intellectually solid, effective in moving the will and sufficiently developed that the reader may find little to do in that respect, as, for instance, the meditations of St. Bonaventure,

of Ven. Louis Da Ponte, Ven. Louis of Grenada, the *Imitation of Christ*, etc.

Then the three preliminary acts essential to prayer must be made as carefully as possible: the placing of oneself in the presence of God, adoration and petition for the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then one or two pages may be slowly read, care being taken not to lose sight of the presence of God, our Creator and our Father. A modest and respectful attitude will prove most helpful to this end. At the end of the two pages, a short pause should be made for reflection, practical application, the examination of shortcomings, the consideration of the virtues which one would acquire and the formation of resolutions. Then the reading may continue. There is no soul that is well disposed which cannot easily make this short reflection.

If while reading one feels disposed to acts of love, praise, oblation, resignation, hope, petition, etc., the heart should be allowed to speak, without fear that the reading will be injured, for all the spiritual fruits which a book contains will never equal those which are found in these holy affections. If the contrary happens, the reading should be

broken off not only for reflection and the formation of resolutions, as has just been stated, but also for the repetition of some vocal prayers chosen beforehand. Acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed, a Psalm, or a decade of the Rosary, are excellent for this purpose. Meditative reading has been practised and counselled by great Saints:

St. Francis of Sales writes to Madame Bourgeois, Abbess of Puits d'Orbe: "Use a book when your mind is tired, reading a little and then meditating; and reading again for a little time and then meditating, until your half hour is finished. Mother Theresa used one in this way from the beginning and said that she derived much benefit from it. And since we are speaking confidentially I will add that I have tried the same plan with much success."[1]

St. Theresa thus describes the method she followed in prayer during the first eighteen years of her religious life: "Never, during all that time, except when I had been to Holy Communion, did I dare to attempt to

[1] *Lettre* 241, t. 12, p. 391.

pray without a book. If I had none, my soul experienced the same terror as if it had to struggle alone against a hostile crowd; when I had one beside me, I was at ease. It was a companion, nay more, a shield on which I received the attacks of the tiresome thoughts which came to disturb my prayer. As a rule, I did not experience dryness of soul, which, on the contrary, I never escaped when I found myself without my trusty armor; suddenly my soul would become agitated and my thoughts wander. By means of my book I could quietly recall the fugitives and keep the attention of, and easily govern, my soul with this powerful charm. Often to effect this I had only to open the book—sometimes only to read a few lines, at others several pages, according to the grace that Our Lord granted to me."[1]

St. Alphonsus Liguori wrote to a nun: "When praying, first read some passage from a book, then make a fixed number of acts or prayers—say, fifty acts of love, fifty oblations of yourself, fifty prayers to obtain perfect love and holy conformity to God's Will.

[1] *Vie par elle-même*, ch. 4. Bouix, 1859, p. 39.

It matters little if you make these acts without inclination." [1]

3. *Mental prayer properly so-called.* St. Ignatius, in speaking to those souls who practice prayer, gives them this advice: "In order to find, with the help of grace, this way (that which suits us best), it is very useful for us to try and to test several, so as to proceed by that which is clearly for us the road to God." [2]

It must be admitted, however, that such liberty in the choice of a method of prayer might lead to dangerous illusions, unless they were prevented, and so the Saint adds what is necessary to his teaching by saying: "If it is true that in business matters we should submit our judgment to the judgment and advice of another, . . . this precaution is more necessary for pious people and in spiritual matters, in proportion as the danger is greater in the path of virtue, when one rushes on unrestrained by the bridle of prudence and discretion." [3]

These two passages contain the common

[1] *Lettres*, éd. Desclée, 1889, Lettre 588, t. 2, p. 296.
[2] *Lettres*, Lettre 58, à saint François de Borgia, p. 269.
[3] *Lettres*, Lettre sur l'obeissance, p. 467.

teaching: for his part the Director should deeply respect the attraction of grace in his penitent and not lose sight of St. Ignatius's other golden maxim: "To seek to lead all souls along the same path is very dangerous and he who acts in this way does not take into account how manifold and varied are the gifts of the Holy Ghost."[1]

But on the other hand the penitent should with great simplicity describe his method of prayer to the pious advisor whom he has chosen and who is learned and experienced in such matters, for this is the safest way of being preserved from illusions, supported in time of spiritual aridity and stimulated in time of dullness.

On this subject St. Francis of Sales says: "The Director ought always to be your Angel, which means, when you have found him, do not look upon him only as a man, nor trust him as such, nor place confidence in his knowledge as such, but in God, Who will assist you and speak to you through the medium of this man, placing in his heart and mouth what is necessary for your happiness. So you should listen to him as to an Angel

[1] *Sentences de Saint Ignace*, 8 sentence.

who comes down from heaven to lead you there. Be open with him, sincere and trusting, showing him clearly the good and bad in you, without pretence or dissimulation, and thus your good qualities will be examined and fortified and your bad ones corrected and cured, and by this means you will be comforted and strengthened in your afflictions, ruled and kept within bounds in your consolations. Repose entire confidence in him, joined to a sacred reverence, in such a way that the reverence does not hinder the trust, nor the trust the reverence. . . . He must be full of charity, knowledge and prudence; if one of these qualities is wanting, there is danger."[1]

[1] *Vie dévote*, ch. 4, t. 3, p. 24.

CHAPTER VI

SIXTH DIFFICULTY: INABILITY TO FOLLOW A COURSE OF REASONING

The inability to reason may arise, first, from spiritual aridity, which was spoken of in the preceding chapter, or may also be the result of one of the four following causes:

1. The soul has little capacity for mental work. By forcing it to examine a subject by means of the reason, not only will nothing be gained, but it will be crushed and disgusted by its efforts to pray. Such a method must be given up.

Yet such a soul is always able to make some very simple reflections, which differ greatly from a continuous reasoning. Thus when the soul sees Our Lord on the Cross, it can say to itself: "Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God, dies for me to expiate my sins. It is just that I should suffer with Him." Or at the sight of the Divine Child lying on the straw in the stable of Bethlehem, the soul may make the following simple consideration: "I understand now that poverty is a treasure

with which Heaven is bought. From henceforth I will accept the privations which poverty imposes upon me with resignation and even with joy."

Such a soul, too, might discuss with Our Lord the great question of its salvation and perfection. Who, indeed, would dare to speak of himself as being unable to examine his conscience, of begging God's pardon for his faults, of seeking from Him remedies for his misfortunes, of taking practical resolutions of reform?

St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, when addressing the people, said: "I see that several among you are frightened at the very name of mental prayer. But why? Do you never think then, of your business, of your household? Ah! no doubt it occupies your thoughts from morning to evening. And so from morning to evening you are making mental prayer or meditation on the things of the world, since you are meditating, and goodness only knows with what solicitude, on the needs of your family, the dangers to which it is exposed, so as to find the most efficacious means of foreseeing the one and avoiding the other. Is it not true? Now, that is

mental prayer as it is made in the world. Why then, can you not, with God's grace, reflect for half an hour on the great question of your eternal salvation, weighing its importance and finding on such reflections an effectual purpose and a firm resolution of putting into practice all that is necessary to assure its success?"[1]

But above all else, the soul which cannot reason can always draw pious affections from its heart. By placing itself with a lively faith in the presence of God in the beginning, it is impossible that the thought of this Father, who welcomes and listens to it as if it alone existed in all the world, should not bring some consolation, if not soothing, at least strengthening. Then let the heart speak, making acts of adoration, praise, resignation, oblation, petition, etc., or, if it feels a spiritual dryness, substituting vocal prayer for these different affections, for that is always within its power.

And lastly, when it has made every effort to do what has just been said, there is no reason for even the shadow of sadness.

[1] *Exercises spirituels*, conférence préliminaire. Casterman, 1886, p. 15.

Should the feeling of discouragement, however, return, it may be easily dispelled by this consoling thought: God, Who exalts the humble, cannot fail to lead simple, trusting souls to holiness, who unceasingly in their prayer repeat: "My God, I belong to Thee without reserve."

The total offering of oneself is the principal point in prayer and the making of this offering lies within the power of everyone.

2. Ill-health is the second cause which makes reasoning impossible, especially brain-fatigue.

I have only one thing to say to those souls who are subjected to such a painful experience: You cannot reflect for any length of time, but it is always possible for you to go to God as to your all-loving Father and resign yourself entirely to His Will, which is infinitely holy, adorable and worthy of being loved. Try it and see. No concentration of mind is in any way necessary in order to say with most perfect faith: "God can grant me no greater grace during this mortal life than that of making me bear the Cross in company with His Son Jesus, in Whom He places all His love." This is the most effective

and certain means of being happy with Him for ever in Heaven. These are not continuous or profound reflections likely to tire those who are sick; quite the contrary, such pious and pleasant thoughts always bring rest and consolation.

Furthermore, want of mental strength can not prevent a soul from examining its daily actions in a cursory manner, of begging God's pardon for its sins and of taking some practical resolutions tending to perfection. But above all, those souls who are tried by sickness must be well convinced that their splitting headache does not prevent generosity of heart. Let them, then, say over and over again when in pain: "This is the Lord's mercy. Thank you, my God, for these precious pearls which Thou showerest upon me." Or better still, with Our Lord: "My Father, Thy Will and not mine be done." "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

How many people suffering from paralysis have we not known who were all alone the whole day, while their friends and relatives were busy elsewhere! Far from being consumed by sadness or weariness, they have preserved their peace of soul. What was the

secret of this admirable patience?—They were constantly praying: "My God, Thy Will be done! I trust myself to Thy holy Will. Give me Thy grace, Thy love and Thy Heaven; I ask for nothing else, for that is enough for me." This is a very simple prayer, which cannot strain the brain and yet which is so perfect that it is enough to lead us to a high state of sanctity.

3. The third cause of difficulty in reasoning arises from a nature which is specially given to warm affections. This is a precious endowment able to lead us far, with the help of grace, on the road to Divine love, but only on condition that the heart is sufficiently generous in its detachment from creatures.

Souls so constituted are not all attracted to the same class of affections. Some prefer a familiar intercourse with God, their Father, and with Jesus Christ, their Brother and their Spouse; while others prefer to repeat acts of adoration, praise, oblation, resignation and self-surrender; and others again like best to repeat passages from Holy Writ glowing with love.

Their preferences should be respected, provided firm resolutions with a view to the

correction of faults and the acquirement of solid virtue are added to the affections toward which attraction is felt. Further, these souls should supply for the intellectual deficiency, which is the outcome of the reflections being omitted, by some serious spiritual reading to enlighten their understanding and show them the sure road to perfection. Under such conditions, the heart is gradually stripped of its attachment to creatures and the love of God comes to take its place.

4. The fourth cause which prevents reasoning in prayer is not natural, as the three preceding ones, but of a supernatural order, consisting of a special movement of the Holy Ghost, which excites the soul in a much greater degree to affections than to reflections. In other words, it is the affective prayer of which we have spoken above.[1]

It is clear that this kind of prayer is superior to the others mentioned. And yet it should not be forgotten that God in prayer makes much more account of generosity of heart than of the perfectness of the method, however advantageous in other respects. For this reason, a soul which is tried by sickness

[1] Cf. Part 3, ch. 1.

and is unable to do anything else but humbly and trustingly resign itself to God, sometimes prays more perfectly than another who has been raised to affective prayer. This is a very consoling and most important thought to those who practice mental prayer, consoling the afflicted, encouraging the hopeless, and enabling those whose perseverance flags to continue to pray, thus leading them, sooner or later, to the promised land of familiarity with God.

PART V

Methods of Prayer in the Exercises of St. Ignatius

CHAPTER I

THE METHOD OF CONTEMPLATION AND ITS PERFECTION

THE first method in the Exercises of St. Ignatius is entitled: Meditation by means of the three powers of the soul. By these words the Saint shows that our three highest faculties ought to be employed—the memory in helping the intellect to reason, the intellect in arousing the will to affections and resolutions. This method of prayer has been explained at length in the first eight chapters of Part II. In order to avoid repetition, I shall say nothing on that subject here, but pass directly to the second method, called Contemplation. The question here is not of contemplation properly so called or passive contemplation, in which the soul has only to receive the light and love shed upon it by the Holy Ghost, but of active contemplation, which is nothing else but an excellent way of meditating. In explaining

this method, some passages already cited from St. Ignatius must necessarily be repeated.

In order that ordinary mental prayer may be perfect,[1] it must, in the first place, be made in peace, quietness and rest. There should be no haste in passing from one thought or affection to another. It is not at all the abundance of ideas which affords food for the soul but the thoroughness with which these ideas are examined by the understanding, the meanings and comparisons found by reflection and which enable the ideas to be better understood; in a word, the formation of practical application to guide the conduct. Neither is it the number of the acts made by the will which is likely to arouse a real enthusiasm for good in the heart. This is found in peace of soul and in the sweetness, ardor, and unction of the affections.

This prayer should, in addition, give rise in the soul to admiration of God and His work, which is indeed the surest means of obtaining profound respect, burning love and boundless generosity, being a prelude to the eternal canticle of Heaven, where the Blessed,

[1] Suarez, *De Oratione*, l. 2, ch. 12, 10; t. 14, p. 168.

enraptured at the sight of God's perfections, repeat day and night: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."[1]

Lastly, and more than all else, perfect prayer should fill the soul with love of God, for the union with God by love is really the end of prayer.[2]

St. Ignatius, who was taught by experience and the grace of the Holy Ghost,[3] saw clearly that these three points are essential to perfect prayer, and introduced them into his method of Contemplation in the Exercises. In the first place, with regard to peace, tranquility, rest and serenity of soul, both in season and out of season, he said: "In the point in which I find what I want there I will rest, without being anxious to pass on, until I content myself, for it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul."[4]

As to admiration, St. Ignatius arouses it in the contemplations on the Divine Perfections by placing before our eyes the spectacle of unspeakable grandeur. It will

[1] Apoc. 4: 8.

[2] See Part I, ch. 3.

[3] Suarez, *De Soc. Jes.*, c. 6, 2, t. 16, p. 1036.

[4] *Spiritual Exercises*, Note 2, Addit. 4. and Annot. 2.

be enough to recall the following lines already cited: "I will consider how all the good things and gifts descend from above; as my poor power from the supreme and infinite Power from above. And so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc., as from the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters, etc."[1] The number, richness and variety of these blessings surpasses all conception, and yet God in creating them remains unchangeable, as He was in the beginning, as He is and as He always will be. A truth which deserves our admiration a thousand times!

In the contemplation on the Life of Our dear Saviour, St. Ignatius excites us to admiration by making us consider the incomparable grace showered on His Sacred soul and body by the Holy Ghost.

"He is a King Whose irresistible charms attract all His subjects who have any spirit,"[2] to follow Him. He is the Lord of the world, all beautiful and filled with all grace, "Who sends His Apostles, Disciples and many others to spread His sacred doctrine among

[1] *Ibid.* Contemplation for Gaining Love, Point 4.
[2] *Ibid.* Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

men of all ages and all ranks."[1] When reading these two Contemplations, the spirit of which should be extended to all the others, instinctively the words of the Prophet are recalled to mind: "Thou art beautiful among the sons of men: grace is poured abroad in thy lips; therefore hath God blessed thee for ever. . . . With thy comeliness and thy beauty set out, proceed prosperously, and reign."[2]

This first picture of the charms of Our Lord's sacred Humanity is not enough for St. Ignatius. Most often he has recourse to the infinite perfections of the Divinity, which are still more likely to enchant us. This is the Saint's usual method in the contemplations on the Passion, for the general idea which must never be lost sight of is: "I will consider how the Divinity hides itself throughout Our Saviour's Passion; that is how it could destroy its enemies and does not, and how it leaves the most sacred Humanity, to suffer so very cruelly."[3] Here St. Ignatius is seen eliciting admiration by the immense

[1] *Ibid.* Two Standards.
[2] Ps. 44: 3, 5.
[3] *Spiritual Exercises*, Week 3, Contemp, 1, Point 5.

contrast between the infinite happiness and glory of the Divine Nature, on the one hand, and, on the other, the unparalleled sufferings and humiliations of the Human Nature, borne for love of us. In this he follows the example of the holy Apostles in the Epistles, especially of St. Paul writing to the Philippians: "For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but debased himself, taking the form of a servant. . . . He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."[1]

But contemplation, in the Exercises, aims more than all else at filling the heart with love of God. In the first place, all the considerations on the Divine attributes are entitled: "Contemplation to obtain the Love of God," and are concluded by an offering arising from the purest love of God: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect and all my will, all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: To Thee, Lord, I return it. All is Thine: dispose of it according to Thy will. Give

[1] Philipp. 2: 5.

me Thy love and grace; for this is enough for me."[1]

With regard to the Contemplations on Our Lord's Life, the soul's constant desire and ever renewed prayer ought to be to know God, "Who became Man for me, more perfectly so as to love more and follow Him."[2] St. Ignatius knew from personal experience and the unction of the Holy Ghost, much more than by reason, that love is a burning fire which unceasingly requires new fuel, so he suggests that offerings should be frequently repeated, formed on the incomparable oblation made by Jesus Christ Our Lord when going to His Passion: "That the world may know that I love the Father. And as the Father hath given me commendment, so do I. Arise, let us go hence."[3]

The first of these offerings is found in the Contemplation on the Reign of Christ and is thus expressed:

"Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation that I want and desire and it is my

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Contemplation for obtaining love, Point 1.

[2] *Ibid.* Week 2, Contem. 1, Prel. 3.

[3] John 14: 31.

determination to imitate Thee in bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit." [1]

Another offering in the consideration on the Third Degree of Humility is formulated as follows: "In order to imitate and be more actually like Christ Our Lord I want and choose poverty with Christ, poor, rather than riches; opprobrium with Christ replete with it, rather than honors, and to be rated as worthless and a fool, for Jesus Christ, Who first was held as such, rather than for wise or prudent in this world." [2]

And finally, when Our Lord appears to us raised from the dead after He has redeemed the world by dying on the Cross, pure love ought always to be the soul, heart and life of all contemplations. All our desires, efforts, prayers must aim at "rejoicing and being intensely glad at so great glory and joy of Christ our Lord." [3] The sweet and touching thought of which we must never lose sight is: How Our Lord Jesus Christ exercises the office of Consoler in favor of His own, as "friends are accustomed to console friends." [4]

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Kingdom of Christ.
[2] *Ibid.* 3 Degree of Humility.
[3] *Ibid.* Week 4, Contem. 1, Prel. 3.
[4] *Ibid.* Week 4, Contemp. 1, Point 5.

To sum up, all contemplation in the Exercises begins with a burning desire and fervent prayer for the love of God, followed by the stirring up of this love in our hearts by means of every possible device, ending in that pure love which gives itself unreservedly to God. A meditation in which love has little part can doubtless be of great help to the soul. Who would dare to deny that St. Ignatius's meditations in his Exercises on the great truths, and those of St. Francis of Sales in his Devout Life are very useful? But such meditations are not filled through and through with love, like the Contemplations of the Exercises.

Let us conclude by saying something about the reason why the name Contemplation is especially suited to the excellent method of meditation of which we have just spoken.

To contemplate a thing does not mean to look at it in passing, but earnestly and with appreciation, until one is entirely satisfied. Again, to contemplate a thing is to consider it at leisure, with attention fixed by a growing admiration. See this artist who cannot take his eyes off a picture by a great master; what is he doing? He is con-

templating it with an admiration which makes him continually discover new beauties. And lastly, to contemplate a thing is to consider it in such a way that the prolonged study arises from love. Take this mother who spends whole hours in looking at her little child in its cradle; is it the result of a fixed determination that she continues this occupation? Not at all, it is because she loves it and her love is a weight which fixes the inclination of her heart and eyes.

The word "Contemplation," then, was a happy choice of St. Ignatius to signify a form of mental prayer of which the principal characteristics are peace, admiration and love. Do I mean that St. Ignatius arrived at this conclusion by means of reasoning, as I have just done? No, he was guided by a Divine instinct and by the grace of the Holy Ghost. The Saint was raised to passive or extraordinary contemplation to be defined as: "the state of the soul simply gazing upon God with peace, admiration and love." St. Ignatius has instinctively filled the active contemplation of his Exercises with peace, admiration and love.

CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL METHOD OF CONTEMPLATION APPLIED PARTICULARLY TO THE MYSTERIES OF OUR LORD'S LIFE

CONTEMPLATION in the Exercises of St. Ignatius implies: "A peaceful exercise of the understanding arousing in the soul admiration and love of God and His works," applicable to the infinite perfections of God, Our Creator, and the mysteries of Our Lord Jesus Christ. But is it not expedient to add some particulars when meditating on Our Divine Master's Life and Death? St. Ignatius thought it advantageous and explains his thought in two exercises, that of the Annunciation and that of the Nativity. I choose the second, in which he says:

"The usual Preparatory Prayer," that is, I will begin by placing myself in the presence of God, adoring Him and begging of Him the grace to make the prayer well.

"The first Prelude is the narrative, and it will be here seen: How Our Lady went forth from Nazareth, about nine months with

child, as can be piously meditated, seated on an ass and accompanied by Joseph and a maid, taking an ox, to go to Bethlehem to pay the tribute which Caesar imposed in all those lands." See the Mysteries, that is, the division of the text of the Gospels under three heads, as is found at the end of the book of the Exercises.

The second, a composition seeing the place. In this contemplation I represent by means of my imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem—its length and breadth. Is it level or does it cross any valleys or hills? In the same way I will consider the cave where Our Saviour is born. Is it large or small, high or low? How prepared?

The third prelude is exactly the same as in the preceding contemplation on the Incarnation; that is, I will ask for an intimate knowledge of the Lord Who was made Man for me, so as to love Him more ardently and follow Him more faithfully.

In the first point I will consider the persons: Our Lady, St. Joseph, the servant and the Infant Jesus when He is born. I will maintain myself in their presence as a poor child and a little servant, unworthy of

appearing before them. I will consider and contemplate, serving them in their needs with all the attention and respect of which I am capable, just as though I were present. And afterwards I will make interior reflection so as to gain some profit.

In the second point I will remark, listen to and contemplate what they say, then I will reflect so as to draw some profit from it.

In the third point, I will watch and consider their actions, how they have traveled and suffered so that Our Lord might be born in extreme poverty and so that after so much labor, having suffered hunger, thirst, heat, cold, insult and rebuff, He might die on the Cross, and all that for me. And I will reflect so as to gain some spiritual profit.

I will end by a colloquy as in the previous meditation, that is I will think of what I ought to say to the three Divine Persons, to the Eternal Word made Flesh, to the Mother of the Word, to Our Lady, and according to what I feel I will ask for all that can help me to follow Our Lord more closely and imitate Him more faithfully, as though He had just been born for me. I will say the Lord's Prayer.

Such is the text. Let us pass to its explanation.

The Preparatory Prayer is made as before and consists in placing oneself in the presence of God, in adoring Him and asking the Holy Ghost for the grace of making well the exercise you are about to begin.

The first Prelude is an exercise of memory, and consists in recalling to mind the mystery as a whole, with its division into three parts, as in the Gospel.

The second Prelude is the composition of place, or the imaginary representation of the setting in which the mystery unfolds itself. St. Ignatius had been in the Holy Land and could have given minute details about the cave of Bethlehem, and yet he does not, but is satisfied with saying: "I will consider the cave in which Our Saviour is born. Is it big or small, high or low, how is it prepared?" The probable cause of this reticence is that a picture with too many details and too distinct would seem to give too much importance to something which is only secondary.

The third Prelude consists in asking for "an intimate knowledge of the Lord, Who was made Man for me, so as to be able to

love Him more ardently and follow Him more generously."

This prayer contains all that can be desired by a soul anxious for perfection, for the imitation of Jesus Christ Our Lord is the most efficacious means of arriving at sanctity. All is seen to be connected in a wonderful manner; intimate knowledge naturally produces ardent love, and ardent love generous imitation.

After these Preludes, which, as a rule, should not last more than a few minutes, we turn to contemplation properly so called. St. Ignatius tells us with reason, to consider three things especially: the persons, the words and the actions. Contemplation is, indeed, a visit to Our Lord in one of the mysteries of His mortal life. Now when paying a visit one naturally occupies oneself with the person visited and with his words and actions.

I. CONTEMPLATE THE PERSONS

This first division must not be taken in its strictest sense, to the exclusion of all that concerns the actions. Such precision

would hinder the quiet exercise of the soul, as well as the action of the Holy Ghost.[1] The meaning is that special attention must be given to the consideration of the persons' dignity and their other qualities, without, however, neglecting their actions. St. Ignatius's idea is certainly such, for he adds, when treating the point relating to the persons, "I will serve them in all their needs, with all the eagerness and respect of which I am capable."

The teaching of the Exercises with regard to the contemplation of the persons may be summed up in the three following counsels:

1. St. Ignatius says that the contemplation of the mystery is not to be made as if it took place nineteen hundred years ago, but as if it were taking place under our eyes. This is, indeed, an excellent means of making meditation with more attention, pleasure, confidence, respect and love, and consequently of gaining from it more abundant graces. In this supposition there is something imaginary, that the mystery is being really enacted under our eyes; but there is, too, something absolutely true, the grace

[1] Cf. Directory c. 19, n, 5, 6.

attached to the mystery and which never varies. We cannot persuade ourselves too fully of this truth: that since the Crib and Calvary, God's hand is not shortened.[1] If some one said to us: In a week you will be able to assist at the birth on earth of the Son of God, we should count the hours and the minutes, joy and hope would so fill our hearts that all earthly preoccupations would be banished and no sacrifice would seem too great in order to enjoy such a privilege. Let us stir up our faith and devote ourselves unreservedly to the same feelings, and meditation will become the most blessed of all hours. But that is not all. St. Ignatius further requires that we should not contemplate the mystery only as spectators, but that we should take an active part in it. "I will consider, contemplate and serve them in their needs with all the eagerness and respect of which I am capable, as though I were really present." A holy device and one fruitful beyond words in arousing an intimate knowledge and burning love of Jesus, the Divine King. It is, in truth, by serving those whom we love and respect in

[1] Is. 59: 1.

their private life that we learn to know them intimately and love them more and more.

2. St. Ignatius advises that in contemplation not any kind of knowledge at all should be sought, but an intimate knowledge of the Divine Master, and justly so, for this knowledge is the surest means of gaining familiarity with God, the source of all good. According to a well-known saying, it is the characteristic of friendship to cause one of the friends to adopt the ideas and feelings of the other. What tongue, therefore, can describe the wondrous virtues implanted in the heart by a holy familiarity with Our loving Saviour!

This is not, however, the only advantage to be drawn from an intimate knowledge of the Divine Master. Another very considerable one is the absence of difficulty and fatigue. "When we love," says St. Augustine, "we do not work, or rather we love the work."[1] Contemplation ceases to be laborious or, if the subject is studied deeply, the work becomes attractive.

3. We must arouse all the adoration of which we are capable in our souls, losing sight neither of the matchless charms of the

[1] *De bono viduitatis*, c. 21, Migne, t. 40, p. 447.

most holy Humanity of our loving Saviour, nor of the infinite dignity of the Person of the word made flesh for love of us.

2. LISTEN TO THE WORDS

The second point is very important, for, as a rule, the subject of our Contemplations should be the Holy Gospels. Now this, the most admirable of all books, is composed for the greater part of our Divine Master's words, full of an incomparable light, beauty and power. Let us say a few words on each of these properties, which we should always bear in mind when contemplating a mystery.

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ's words are full of light: "I am the light of the world," He says; "he that followeth Me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life."[1] When working a gold mine, the ground is excavated in every direction; so as not to lose a particle of the treasure of Divine light, neither reflection nor reasoning must be neglected. The work of the intellect should, doubtless, be calm and tranquil, but the absence of agitation does not exclude application of the mind.

[1] John 8: 12.

Thus St. Ignatius says: "A pause will be made on each word as long as it furnishes thoughts, comparisons, interior joy and consolation. And again: If it should happen that one or two words provide sufficient matter for reflection and furnish spiritual appreciation and consolation, even though it be for the whole hour, there is no need to go beyond these words."[1] In accordance with this rule, the Saint chose only three or four sentences for Contemplation, even from Our Divine Master's longest discourses, so convinced was he that one word well studied teaches more than several considered superficially.

There is, however, one exceptional case, when a special light of the Holy Ghost supplies in great part for the reasoning. "If the person who is making the contemplation," says the saintly writer, "finds something because his intellect is enlightened by the Divine power, he will get more spiritual relish and fruit."[2]

In the same sense the Imitation of Christ says:

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, 2 Method of Prayer.
[2] *Ibid.* Annot. 2.

"It is I
"That teaches man knowledge,
"And give a clear understanding to the little ones
"Than can be taught by man. . . .
"It is I that teach men to despise the things of earth,
"To loathe the present things,
"To seek the eternal,
"To relish the eternal,
"To fly from honors,
"To suffer scandals,
"To put all hope in Me,
"To want nothing beyond Me,
"And above all to love Me ardently."[1]

2. Our Lord's words are of ravishing beauty. "All, . . ." says St. Luke, "wondered at the words of grace that proceeded from his mouth;"[2] and the followers of the Pharisees, sent to apprehend Jesus, came back and said: "Never did man speak like this man."[3]

Our Divine Master's words, inimitably simple, are yet of such depth that as long as time lasts new wonders will be found in them, and so sublimely elevated are they, that they will be understood only in Heaven. The

[1] Bk. 4 ch. 43. [2] Luke 4: 22. [3] John 7: 46.

charms of this Divine eloquence infinitely surpass that of human speakers.

From this it must be concluded that, since Our Lord's words are wonderfully beautiful, we ought to profit of them by arousing in our souls an admiration productive of personal holiness and apostolic zeal.

Our Divine Master's words are all-powerful. To take one instance: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor," was enough to lead a St. Antony in the desert.[1] And one other: "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor two coats, nor shoes," was sufficient to make a St. Francis of Assisi.[2] No souls are so crushed that these words do not restore them, no heart so cold that they do not warm it, for He who is truth itself has said: "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened and I will refresh you";[3] and again: "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?"[4]

Our most loving Saviour's words are seen not only to show us the way which leads to heaven but to give us besides strength, suffi-

[1] Breviary, 17 Jan.
[2] Breviary, 4 Oct.
[3] Matth. 11: 28.
[4] Luke 12: 49.

cient and more than sufficient, for traversing the road. What marvels of sanctification we should find in these blessed words, if we but knew the gift of God!

But let no one forget that this teaching, so full of light, beauty and power, cannot be fully understood unless a ray of light is sent from Heaven, as Jesus said to His beloved Apostles on the eve of His death: "The Holy Ghost, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and will bring all things to your mind whatsoever I shall have said to you."[1] So then, when contemplating the words of the Gospels, we must frequently raise our hearts to God to beg His light. Further, it is fitting that we appeal to Jesus Christ Our Lord to impart to these words a warmth to inflame our hearts and make us say with the disciples of Emmaus: "Was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way and opened to us the Scriptures?"[2]

[1] John 14: 26. [2] Luke 24: 32.

3. CONTEMPLATE THE ACTIONS

We have four thoughts calculated to help us in the contemplation of the actions:

1. We should not contemplate the actions as having taken place nineteen centuries ago, but as taking place under our very eyes; and, in addition we must take an active part in them.

2. The sight of the actions ought to lead us to an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ Our Lord, which causes familiarity with God, the source of innumerable graces, to spring up.

3. In contemplating the actions, we ought to gain an admiration of Our Divine Model and so excite ourselves to a love ever increasing in its ardor. This is not a difficult matter, for the scenes of the Holy Gospels are worthy, a thousand times, of delighting our hearts. What more touching than Jesus' compassion for the four thousand who followed Him into the desert and were worn out and weary? [1] What more consoling than the sight of the indescribable kindness with

[1] Mark 8: 2.

which Jesus received sinners: Peter, who had denied Him, Mary Magdalen, and the woman of Samaria? But it is especially during the Passion that the virtues of our most Holy Redeemer shine with the greatest brilliancy. Pilate, himself, on witnessing Jesus' silence in the midst of calumnies, was forced to admiration.[1]

4. The consideration of our Divine King's actions ought to make us follow in His footsteps by imitating His virtues. He Himself is our Teacher: "I have given you an example that as I have done to you, so you do also."[2] The example Jesus gives at Bethlehem when lying on a bed of straw, says to us audibly: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."[3] Poverty is the treasure with which Heaven is bought. In the midst of the Agony and shame of the Crowning with Thorns, the Divine King's voice is raised more loudly than ever: "Blessed are they that mourn." "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake; be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven."[4]

[1] Mark 15: 5.
[2] John 13: 15.
[3] Matth. 5: 3.
[4] Matth. 5: 5, 11, 12.

This is the most favorable moment of all for taking resolutions which will not flag.

And then one last question arises: Is it out of harmony with the simplicity of the method which has been explained, to rise to the bosom of God and there contemplate the first causes of the mystery? Not at all, for we read in the contemplation on the Incarnation, which should be a model for the others: I will consider "the three Divine Persons as on their royal throne or seat of their Divine Majesty; how They look on all the surface and circuit of the earth and all the people . . . dying and going down to hell."[1] Besides the Directory of the Exercises makes a formal statement on this subject.[2]

This sublime consideration may be entertained, then, without fear. Soon admiration will be seen to reach its highest point and we shall be forced to exclaim with the Apostles: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, Contem. 1, Point 1.
[2] Directory, c. 19: 7.

unsearchable His ways."[1] Then a voice will be heard from Heaven. "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten son;"[2] and again: "God commendeth his charity toward us; because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us."[3] We shall answer from a heart which makes no reserve: "Let us therefore love God, because God first hath loved us."[4]

COLLOQUY

The final colloquy is at once an offering and a prayer. It is well to offer to Our Lord God the resolutions taken during contemplation, for His gracious acceptance and confirmation. Besides, a powerful grace is needed to put them in practice, and this grace God grants only to those who earnestly beg for it. Our prayer, then, must be fervent.

St. Ignatius advises us most often to make a threefold prayer; first, to Our Lady, followed by the Angelical Salutation; secondly, to Jesus Christ Our Lord followed by the Soul of Christ; thirdly, to God the Father, ending

[1] Rom. 11: 33.
[2] John 3: 16.
[3] Rom. 5: 8, 9.
[4] 1 John 4: 19.

with the Lord's Prayer.[1] But this is only advice offered, and one is free to follow the impulse of grace.

[1] *Ibid.* Contemplation on the Incarnation, Two Standards, Three Classes, Three Degrees of Humility.

CHAPTER III

METHOD OF PRAYER ENTITLED APPLICATION OF THE FIVE SENSES

After the Preparatory Prayer and the three Preludes it is helpful to pass the five senses of the imagination through the mysteries, in the following way:

The first point is to see the persons with the light of my imagination, meditating and contemplating in particular the details about them and drawing some profit from the sight.

The second, to hear what they are or might be talking about and reflecting on oneself to draw some profit from it.

The third, to smell and to taste with the smell and the taste of the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity, of the soul, and of its virtues, and of all, according to the person who is being contemplated; reflecting on oneself and drawing profit from it.

The fourth, to touch with the touch, as for instance to embrace and kiss the place

where such persons put their feet and sit, always seeing to drawing profit from it.

One has to finish with one colloquy, as in the first and second Contemplation, and with an Our Father.

We have five external senses, sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, to which correspond, in the inferior part of the soul, five internal senses, which St. Ignatius calls the senses of the imagination. Further, just as the body has five external senses, by means of which it knows and enjoys material things, so the mind has five corresponding senses, by means of which it perceives spiritual things. St. Bonaventure, relying on the authority of the book called *The Spirit and the Soul*, thus proves the existence of these five senses:

"As man is composed of body and soul, and as there are in the body five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch—which however act only in conjunction with the soul, so in a like manner the soul has five senses of its own nature, for spiritual things cannot be considered by the corporal, but by the spiritual senses. . . . Hence the divine Voice says in Deuteronomy: 'See ye that I alone am and there is no other God besides

me' (Deut. 32, 39). There we have spiritual sight. And in the Apocalypse: 'He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith to the churches.' (Apoc. 2, 29), that is spiritual hearing. And in Psalm 33 : 9: 'O taste and see that the Lord is sweet. This is spiritual taste.' And the Apostle says: 'We are the good odor of Christ' (2 Cor. 2: 15), which is spiritual odor. Lastly, in the Gospel Our Lord shows that a woman touched Him rather in faith than in body when He said: 'Somebody hath touched me' (Luke, 8: 46). That is spiritual touch."[1]

St. Ignatius, while leaving it open as to whether the spiritual senses or those of the imagination are to be employed, counsels the use of the latter for sight, hearing and touch, and the spiritual senses for taste and smell. The holy writer is very reserved in what concerns imaginary touch, not allowing the garments, much less the hands and feet to be kissed, but only those places where the persons we are contemplating walk or rest;

[1] *De Septem itineribus aeternitatis, de sexto itinere*, distinct. 2, Ed. Vivès, t. 8, p. 465. "The Spirit and the Soul" was formerly attributed to St. Augustine, but it is a spurious work, thought to be by Alcher, a monk of Clairvaux, without there being, however, any certainty on the point.

for instance, Our Lord's footprints, the straw in the Crib, the wood of the Cross, the instruments of the Passion, etc. . . . These are very wise directions, for a supreme respect must always be maintained for Our Lord's adorable Person, and abuses easily arise. Besides, an overexcited sensibility, instead of assisting salutary reflections and pious affections, sometimes becomes a serious obstacle to them.

This rule, however, must not be applied rigorously to souls possessing unusual ingenuousness, and urged, furthermore, by grace to be allowed greater latitude; as, for instance, to take the Divine Child Jesus from the hands of the most Holy Virgin and press him to their hearts, as St. Stanislas did. Here a prudent director is necessary.

These preliminary ideas were not useless. Now let us study the spirit of the third manner of praying. In certain Catholic countries the mysteries of the Passion are still represented on the stage as formerly in the Middle Ages. The spectators watch, listen, and without any effort on their part, beneficial reflections and pious affections arise spontaneously in their hearts; and at the

end they go away silent and thoughtful, with a firm desire of reforming their lives and generously imitating our Lord Jesus Christ.

Something similar takes place in the application of the sight, hearing and touch of the imagination. We watch what takes place, hear what is said, and even touch the objects, with the reserve which has been mentioned, while pious thoughts spring up of their own accord in our souls. Later on we perceive feelings of admiration, love, joy and praise, arising involuntarily within us, to which is added the resolution of generously imitating the Divine Model which we have under our eyes. This is the last fruit to be gained, and St. Ignatius reminds us of it in the words with which he concludes the application of each sense: "Drawing some profit from it." It only remains to explain briefly the application of the spiritual senses of taste and smell, which St. Ignatius uses to make us realize the infinite sweetness of the Divinity of Jesus Christ our Lord, and the matchless fragrance of His most holy Soul.

The Divinity, the most holy Soul, the virtues of Jesus Christ Our Lord are spiritual things and therefore beyond the range of the

soul's faculties of sense-perception. Consequently, there can be no question in this place of taste and smell as represented by the imagination, but rather of acts of the understanding and will that bear some analogy to these material senses.

The application of the spiritual taste and smell to the soul and virtues of Our Blessed Lord, is the natural outcome of sight and hearing applied imaginatively to the outward circumstances of the mystery. History supplies many an apt illustration. Thus, the very sight of St. Aloysius Gonzaga was wont to produce a spiritual fragrance of purity in the souls of those who beheld him; the modesty of St. Eustochium used to cause in the souls of those who conversed with her a spiritual and heavenly sweetness. Will anyone gainsay that a like privilege attaches to the imaginative contemplation of Jesus Christ Our Lord in Whom are hidden all the treasures of Divine Wisdom? A wholly spiritual fragrance will fill to overflowing the soul faithful to grace which contemplates in this manner the matchless virtues of our sweetest Saviour. Hence there will arise within it pious reflections tending to make the Divine Master

more intimately known, in order that He may be more ardently loved and followed more closely. These reflections will be followed by affections, strong and tender, and the heart will pour itself forth in sentiments of admiration, of reverence and of love. Lastly, resolutions will be taken leading the soul generously to imitate the virtues of Our Lord and to live for Him alone.

It only remains to explain these words of the text of the Exercises: "I will breathe and taste the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the divinity." When a soul has the habit of beholding God in all creatures, it does not rest in the mere enjoyment of spiritual consolation, but rising instinctively from the tiny rivulet to the fountainhead, it places its whole happiness in the infinite sweetness of the Divinity, considered not only as being our own supreme good, but above all as being the eternal good of God.

The fire is now kindled, but it must be kept up. This is done by short and frequent upliftings of the heart. One may say, for instance, at intervals of longer or shorter duration: "How sweet Thou art, O my God, Thou art sweetness itself! . . . All the sweet-

ness to be found on earth seems contemptible, when I taste of Thy infinite sweetness! . . . How silly I have been to seek consolation in the pleasures of the world! . . . Henceforward, O my God, Thy sovereign sweetness will render pleasant all bitterness. . . . From this moment onwards, my whole joy will be in living for Thee alone. . . . Whether I live or whether I die, I will keep saying: Thy eternal blessedness, O my God, will ever be the delight of my heart."

These ejaculatory prayers must not follow each other in too rapid succession, for then the soul could not taste at leisure the infinite sweetness of God; nor must they be too spaced, because their frequency keeps up the fervour. Finally, what the proper measure is must be sought in the attraction of grace and the unction of the Holy Ghost.

It is quite clear that such an application of the senses cannot take place unless the soul enjoys sweet interior consolation, for how taste the delicious coolness of an oasis in that of a breeze, if the breeze itself is almost imperceptible.

I will end, as St. Ignatius says, by reflecting and taking some practical resolutions.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD OF PRAYER ENTITLED: THE SECOND METHOD OF PRAYER

St. Ignatius says that the First Method of Prayer is a spiritual exercise which is very useful to the soul and disposes it to offer to God a prayer which may be pleasing to Him, rather than a method or manner of praying properly so called. Nothing, then, will be said about it here.

The second method of prayer consists in carefully weighing the meaning of each word in the prayer. (If one word alone does not give complete sense, several must be taken.) [1]

After the preparatory prayer, made kneeling or sitting, according to the capability of the body and the attraction of the soul, the eyes being closed or fixed on one spot and not allowed to wander from one object to another, the first words of the Our Father will be said, pausing on each word as long as the consideration of the title of 'Father'

[1] *Directory*, ch. 37, 8.

furnishes thoughts, comparisons, interior relish and consolation. Each word of the Lord's Prayer will be similarly treated, or any other prayer upon which one wishes to meditate in this way.

If one or two words happen to furnish sufficient matter for reflection, even though it be for the whole hour, provided pleasure and spiritual consolation are found in meditating upon them, one need not trouble to go beyond, but when the hour is finished, the rest of the Lord's Prayer will be recited in the ordinary way.

At the end of the prayer a short petition will be made to the person addressed in the prayer, to beg for the virtues and graces of which one stands most in need.

The idea of this method is the extraction of the spiritual essence, so to speak, of a text taken from Holy Writ, so as to draw abundant profit from it, for each word of Scripture is spirit and life.[1] As much may be said, in proportion, of the Sacred Liturgy.

To this end a pause must be made on each word as long as spiritual food is found for

[1] John 6: 64.

the intellect and the will. The former consists of a deeper knowledge of the sacred word, whether obtained by reason or divine light;[1] the latter, of the spiritual consolation due to an appreciation of the text chosen. If, then, by means of reflection the soul finds a meaning or comparison to enlighten it, affections or spiritual appreciation to console it—in a word, light for the understanding and agreeable yet forcible motives to move the will, a pause must be made until the soul is quite satisfied. For instance, if while meditating on the word Father the soul is moved to tears of devotion, if it feels detached from the transitory, attracted towards the eternal and filled with love of God, so as no longer to love anything except in Him and for Him, it should yield to the grace and allow itself to be filled with these holy feelings. To pass to the next word without having extracted the whole essence of the first, would be as foolish as to put out a fire, only to light it again afterwards.

It sometimes happens that after meditating for some time on a text of Scripture,

[1] *Exercises*, Annot. 2.

the need of repeating it is felt, as though it were a refrain; just as the disciples of a great master are never tired of repeating one of his sayings and musicians keep on singing over and over again an air which has pleased them. One must yield to the impulse of grace and repeat the passage as long as it remains taking. The repetition will imprint the words more deeply upon the mind and heart. It is exactly this repetition that forms, in this case, the attraction and spiritual consolation to which St. Ignatius bids us yield, without troubling to go further.

For instance, I am meditating on St. Paul's text: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God."[1] After contemplating the bottomless abyss of the Divine Wisdom, a feeling of admiration arises in my soul and I feel the need of repeating over and over again the words: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!" I should yield to this attraction and repeat these words, which will imprint more perfectly in me the

[1] Rom. 11: 33.

feeling of full and blind submission to all the Divine decrees.

In the same way, I am meditating on this text of the Apostle: "I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me."[1] My heart is gradually overcome by love and I reach the state of no longer thinking of my own interests, but of Our Lord's; and at the same time I feel the need of repeating the words: "I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me." I should, again, give myself up to this impulse of grace, for in proportion as the words pass my lips, I discard my earthly feelings to adopt those of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

This method of prayer, the frequent repetition of a pious phrase, is justified by the example of the Saints; St. Ignatius when contemplating the skies loved to repeat: "How despicable the earth is, when I look at the sky!"

St. Francis Xavier, when dying in the hut at Sancian, unceasingly repeated the words: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."[2]

In her last moments St. Theresa constantly repeated: "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted

[1] Gal. 2: 20. [2] Mark 10: 47.

spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."[1]

St. Gertrude used to recite as many as three hundred and sixty-five times these words of the Our Father: "Thy Will be done," always with a new and increasing pleasure.

[1] Ps. 50: 19.

CHAPTER V

METHOD OF PRAYER ENTITLED: THE THIRD METHOD OF PRAYER

THIS third method consists in praying by heart and pronouncing with the lips one word of the Lord's Prayer or some other prayer for each breath in or out, so that only one word is pronounced between each breath. The time which elapses between one breath and another should be employed in the special consideration of the meaning of each word, the dignity of the person to whom the prayer is addressed, our own unworthiness, or the difference between so much excellence on one side and such baseness on the other. All the words of the Our Father will be treated in the same way.

The special aim of this method of prayer is the attentive and devout recitation of vocal prayers. It consists in the consideration, for the space of one respiration, of the meaning of the word just pronounced. If, through ignorance of liturgical language or

through fatigue, this cannot be done, it will be sufficient to consider the excellence of the person addressed in the prayer.

This method may be applied with advantage, first, to the recitation of the Psalms. It is a very good means of preventing the routine which easily arises in the recitation of the Divine Office.[1]

Pious souls, too, can use it with great spiritual profit in the following way:

When reciting a psalm or liturgical prayer, a pause will be made after each verse, so that a short act of faith, hope, charity, adoration, thanksgiving or petition may be made. It is an easy way of making a large number of these acts without repugnance, acts glorifying God and sanctifying us. Take for example the Creed and the Act of Faith. After the words: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth," an act of faith is made by adding: "My God, this I believe, because Thou hast revealed it to me, and Thou art truth itself." Then the second article is taken: "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord;" and, as before, the words: "My God, this I believe,

[1] *Directory*, ch. 37, 12.

because Thou hast revealed it to me, and Thou art truth itself," are added; and so on, up to the last article: "I believe in life everlasting. Amen."

This manner of reciting the Creed is very useful during life and still more so at the hour of death.[1] Most of the Saints have been anxious at this moment to make not only a general act of faith, but also a profession of faith in the principal revealed truths. The third method of prayer applied, as has just been done, to the Creed, allows all pious souls to follow their example with ease.

[1] Polanco, *Methodus adjuvandi eos qui moriuntur*, c. 5.

CHAPTER VI

THE ANNOTATIONS OF THE EXERCISES

UNDER the title Annotations and additions, St. Ignatius gives valuable advice for the spiritual life. Some treat of prayer, others of the connection of the meditations during retreats, and others, again, of the choice of a state of life. Only those which concern prayer will be studied here, beginning with the Annotations. As the first is not concerned with prayer, it will be omitted.

Second Annotation

If the person who is making the contemplation, takes the true groundwork of the narrative and, discussing and considering for himself, finds something which makes the events a little clearer or brings them a little more home to him—whether this comes through his own reasoning or because his intellect is enlightened by the Divine Power, he will get more spiritual relish and fruit than if he who is giving the Exercises had

much explained and amplified the meaning of the events. For it is not knowing much but realizing and relishing things interiorly that contents and satisfies the soul.

Even if one has to expend much effort in studying the subject, the considerations thus found are preferable to those exposed by another. Does not the gardener prefer the fruits of the garden he has cultivated with so much care to those of a stranger's garden which have cost him nothing?

Besides, for a much better reason, more spiritual appreciation and fruit is found from personal reasoning, facilitated by the abundant light which the Holy Ghost sheds upon the soul.

But then, how is it that meditation books of the highest authority, such as those of St. Bonaventure, Ven. Louis Da Ponte and Ven. Louis of Grenada develop the subject so fully.

A great number of souls who pray are not able to study a subject deeply by themselves and, consequently, cannot do anything else scarcely but assimilate what they have heard or read. For such, then, a long development is necessary. Even in the case of souls who

are able to find something for themselves or are favored by a Divine light which supplies all deficiencies, these books will not prove useless, since admirable pages for spiritual reading will be found in the great authors cited. But further, they can choose for each meditation one or two thoughts from what they have read, which they can study more deeply by means of reasoning proper, or the Divine light which is given them so abundantly.

Third Annotation

As, in all the following spiritual exercises, we use acts of the intellect in reasoning, and acts of the will, in movements of the feelings, let us remark that in the acts of the will, when we are speaking vocally or mentally with God Our Lord, or with His Saints, greater reverence is required on our part than when we are using the intellect in understanding.

The basis of all prayer is God's presence, in which one must keep oneself throughout the meditation. So, whether reflection is being made by the intellect, or affections

of the will are being aroused, all takes place under the eye of God, but in a different way in each case.

When we reason, we are working in God's sight; when we are making affections, we are speaking to Him, and hence we owe Him then more respect. It is indeed quite natural that more respect should be shown towards a superior in addressing him than when one is only working in his presence.

Fifth Annotation

It is very helpful to him who is receiving the exercises to enter into them with great courage and generosity towards his Creator and Lord, offering Him all his will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all that he has, according to His most holy Will.

Among the dispositions which fit the soul for profiting of a retreat or simply of a meditation, the most important is that pointed out here, namely, liberality towards one's Creator and Lord.

Doubtless solitude and recollection go far towards the success of the meditation, the

work of the intellect seeking for truth has a great influence on it, and pious devices are most useful to the same end; but none of these means can be compared to the generosity in a soul which offers itself wholly and entirely to the Divine Majesty, to be disposed of, together with all its possessions, according to God's most holy Will. Prayer is a work of supernatural excellence, demanding before all else a powerful grace, which God grants only to those who give themselves unreservedly to Him.

Moreover, the aim of prayer is the perfect union of love with God, which consists in belonging entirely to God and trusting implicitly in His providence. Is not the best disposition for this perfect union the entire offering of oneself to the Divine Majesty?

Sixth Annotation

When he who is giving the Exercises sees that no spiritual movements, such as consolations or desolations, come to the soul of him who is exercising himself, and that he is not moved by different spirits, he ought to inquire carefully of him about the Exercises,

whether he makes them at their appointed times, and how. So too, of the Additions, whether he observes them with diligence. Let him ask him in detail about each of these things.

When the soul finds consolation, the divine action is plain and there remains nothing but to enjoy it humbly and gratefully. It is a good sign, again, when the soul is tempted, for the devil's rage proves that it is making sure progress. But when the soul experiences neither consolation nor desolation for a considerable time, its state is not so clear.

To be sure, this may be a trial: God tempts the soul, for He wishes to see up to what point it is capable of advancing in His service and working for His glory, when deprived of the powerful grace which makes all easy. But there is also cause to fear lest this torpor arises from negligence. Hence a serious examination is imperative.

Twelfth Annotation

As he who is receiving the Exercises is to give an hour to each of the five Exercises or Contemplations which will be made daily,

he who is giving the Exercises is to warn him carefully to always see that his soul remains content in the consciousness of having been the full hour in the exercise, and rather more than less. For the enemy is not a little used to try and make one shorten the hour of such contemplation, meditation or prayer.

The devil uses every effort to make us shorten the hour devoted to meditation, for he knows that, of all the infidelities connected with prayer, this is the most deadly. When a soul that is called to perfection yields to the temptation of shortening the meditation, it will find that its strength gives out. Faithfulness in not cutting a minute off the fixed time, then, is extremely important. St. Ignatius here warns us most seriously of this.

Thirteenth Annotation

It must likewise be remarked that as in the time of consolation it is easy and not irksome to be in the contemplation the full hour, so it is very hard in the time of desolation to fill it out. For this reason, the person who is exercising himself, in order to

act against the desolation and conquer the temptations, ought always to stay somewhat more than the full hour, so as to accustom himself not only to resist the adversary, but even overthrow him.

This Annotation is the complement of the previous one. Great courage is required in time of desolation to complete the hour's prayer, and that for three reasons. The soul is then sad and listless and the determined effort to shake off this listlessness, which at times even results in sleep, is very painful. Secondly, at such a time God seems deaf to our voice. Now it is very difficult to keep on knocking at a door which no one comes to open. Lastly, and principally, the soul seems then separated from its Creator, Who shows it no love. How difficult it is then to tell God that you love Him, that your only desire is His glory and your only wish His good pleasure!

Faith, it is true, teaches us with all certainty that God is listening to us and loves us as long as we love Him, but this knowledge is often clouded and, in time of desolation, is scarcely sufficient to move the will. Hence the soul must act in opposition to its feelings,

and, without the slightest doubt, this is extremely difficult.

St. Ignatius wishes us to persevere a little beyond the hour so as to defeat the enemy. This is the application of one of the greatest principles of his spirituality: In the struggle between nature and the devil, we must not only resist, but take the offensive by doing the opposite of what he suggests.[1]

Here we have a practical objection. In religious communities, meditation finishes at the sound of the bell, and so it is impossible to prolong the time beyond the hour.

If the letter of the Annotation cannot be kept, at least its spirit should. An extra visit to the Blessed Sacrament, for instance, may be made during the course of the day, or some other such exercise, until the desolation disappears. If, as rarely happens, it continues for weeks, months or even years, the remedy would be unswerving fidelity in never shortening the prayer, together with perfect conformity to God's Will, infinitely just, holy, adorable and worthy of being loved, in company with Our Lord in the

[1] *Spiritual Exercises*, remark on the meditation of the Three Classes, and Rule 12 for the Discernment of Spirits, Week 1.

Garden of Olives. In the midst of the greatest desolation that ever was, He did not cease to repeat: "My Father, Thy will, not mine, be done."

Fifteenth Annotation

In the spiritual Exercises, when seeking the Divine Will, it is more fitting and much better that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate to His devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in future. So, he who is giving the Exercises should not turn or incline to one side or the other, but standing in the centre like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord.

When a soul gives itself unreservedly to God, the Director should reverence God's immediate action upon the Lord's well-beloved. It is not fitting that the Director should enter the sacred sanctuary where God and the soul speak of their mutual love; his office is to watch, so as to prevent the devil from forcing the door of this blessed

refuge and the flood of passions from disturbing the peace.

Let himself confine himself to pointing out to the soul the devil's devices, guarding it from the illusions of nature and supporting it in the desolation and dryness which will surely follow the actual consolation.

Sixteenth Annotation

That the Creator and Lord may work more surely in His creature, it is very expedient, if it happens that the soul is attached or inclined to a thing inordinately that one should move himself, putting forth all his strength to come to the contrary of what he is wrongly drawn to. Let the soul be instant in prayer and other spiritual exercises, and test that it does not want this or any other thing, unless His Divine Majesty, putting his desires in order, change his first inclination for him, so that the motive for desiring or having one thing or another be only the service, honor and glory of His Divine Majesty.

Grave sins in the past are not at all an insurmountable hindrance to excellent prayer, as we see in the case of St. Paul, St. Magdalen,

St. Augustine, St. Mary of Egypt and other Saints; but a present disordered affection which we do not wish to give up, is an absolute obstacle.

Those who wish to pray well ought to make a total immolation of themselves to the Divine Majesty. Hence, when a soul which wishes to gain the perfection of prayer, notices that it still retains some inordinate affection, it must use every effort to destroy it.

Among the various means which may be employed, the most indispensable of all is prayer. Indeed, a powerful grace granted only to those who pray, is necessary for rooting out the last and most tenacious of all one's faults. How should our prayer be expressed? In our struggles against nature and the devil, St. Ignatius tells us that we must not be satisfied with resistance, but we must firmly adopt the offensive. The soul, then, should beg for what is diametrically opposed to its desires, and this, in spite of the repugnance of nature, should be done in union with Jesus Christ Our Lord in the Garden of Olives.

CHAPTER VII

THE ADDITIONS OF THE EXERCISES

First Addition

AFTER going to bed, just when I want to go asleep, I will think for the space of a Hail Mary of the hour that I have to rise, and for what, making a *resumé* of the exercise which I have to make.

When occupied with a matter of temporal importance, we find it difficult to turn our thoughts from it when the hour for sleep has come and we determine to give it our attention the first thing the next morning. Indeed, in the morning, we very quickly take it up again and continue our thoughts of the previous evening.

Why change our method when the matter is of eternal importance? To think in the evening of the meditation which will immediately follow our getting up is an excellent means of fixing our attention upon this holy exercise from the first moment of rising.

St. Ignatius adds: "Before going to sleep I will make a short mental summary of the exercise which I am to make, for as long as would be required to say a Hail Mary."

This short exercise of the memory is most useful, for the night's rest ripens the last thoughts which occupied our attention before falling to sleep. "Lord," says the Prophet, "if I have remembered Thee upon my bed, I will meditate on Thee in the morning."

Second Addition

When I wake up, not giving place to any other thought, I will turn my attention immediately to what I am going to contemplate, . . . and I will occupy myself with these thoughts while dressing.

Evidently, no anticipation of the meditation proper is here meant, but a general view of the subject as a whole, while ejaculations also may be included.

But what is to be done if one awakens during the night or suffers from insomnia? St. Ignatius does not certainly require that one should so dwell upon the subject as to

[1] Ps. 62: 7.

make the return of sleep more difficult, for in the tenth Addition he says: "As to the time to be given to sleep, we must not, as a general rule, retrench from that which is necessary." Therefore it seems better to keep oneself in the presence of God without agitation, contenting oneself with pious thoughts and affections, which rise of their own accord in the mind and spring up spontaneously in the heart of those who have arrived at familiarity with God.

Third Addition

A step or two before the place where I have to contemplate or meditate, I will put myself standing for the space of an Our Father, my intellect raised on high, considering how God Our Lord is looking at me, etc., and I will make an act of reverence or humility.

Not only a useful, but a most necessary Addition, calling attention to the two preliminary acts which should never be omitted before any prayer, that of placing oneself in the presence of God and that of adoring Him. These ideas have already been de-

veloped in the previous pages.[1] St. Ignatius tells us to make the acts standing, the mind raised to Heaven, following Our Lord's example, of Whom St. John says: "These things Jesus spoke, and lifting up his eyes to heaven he said: 'Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son.'"[2] The length of these Preludes should not be more than that required to say an Our Father. However, any special impulse of grace should be respected.

St. Ignatius adds: "I must consider that Our Lord Jesus Christ is looking at me." This is an important remark, for in the fact of God's looking at me I am conscious of two things: first, of the respect which I owe to His Majesty. "God looketh upon the earth and maketh it tremble."[3] Ought I not, then, to humble myself to the very dust before Him?

The second thing that I note is not only the infinite Majesty and at the same time, sweetness of God's regard, but also the love of God, my Father, Who seems to leave the direction of the universe for a time, so as

[1] Part 2, ch. 2: 3. [2] John 17: 1. [3] Ps. 103: 32.

to give me all His attention, in somewhat the same way as a great monarch retires for a few hours from the whirl of business so as to give himself wholly to his family. This thought was very dear to the Saints and they found much consolation in it, as their writings prove.

This consideration is followed by adoration, the first duty of the rational being when it finds itself in the presence of its Creator.

It is a pious custom, if one is alone, to prostrate oneself for a moment so as to adore God, following Our Lord's example, of Whom the Gospel says: "And going a little further, He fell upon his face."[1]

Fourth Addition

I will enter on the contemplation now on my knees, now prostrate on the earth, now lying face up, now seated, now standing, always intent on seeking what I want. And here I will observe two rules: First, that if I find what I want kneeling, I will not pass on; and if prostrate, likewise, etc. The

[1] Matth. 26: 39.

second, in the point in which I find what I want there I will rest, without being anxious to pass on, until I content myself.

This Addition points out the different postures that may be adopted, and prescribes that the one which is best suited to gaining the desired devotion should be chosen. These various postures are only a means. Now means should be suited to the end. St. Ignatius here large-mindedly includes the positions suitable both for the sick and for those in good health. It would, indeed, be an abuse for those who are in good health to lie down, their eyes towards heaven, for this position is only suitable to the sick or weak.

The Addition further states that we should stop and rest, and not pass from one point to another unless the soul is quite satisfied. This injunction is so supremely important that it is well to explain its exact meaning.

The spiritual rest of which St. Ignatius is here speaking is of three kinds: First, that which follows after reflection, when the soul has made a sufficient study of the truths sought. For instance, I have succeeded in convincing myself by means of different

reflections, of the excellence of a blind obedience, such as that of Jesus at Nazareth. I rest content with this idea, without seeking to go further to the bottom of the subject, in somewhat the same manner as a painter who has studied by turns the different parts of a picture, rests himself by looking at the whole.

In the second place, that which the soul that is impelled much more to affections than reflections, finds in trusting confidently in Providence, in the hope of Heaven, and in conformity to God's Will by means of tender, sweet and fervent acts which arise quietly and calmly in the very depths of the heart.

In the third place, that rest which the soul that is tried by spiritual aridity finds in submitting wholly and entirely to God's most holy Will; saying in union with Jesus on the Cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit;[1] . . . but yet not my will, but thine, be done."[2]

[1] Luke 23: 46. [2] Luke 22: 42.

Fifth Addition

After finishing the exercise I will, during the space of a quarter of an hour, seated or walking, leisurely look how it went with me in the Contemplation or Meditation. If it has not been satisfactory, I will look for the cause from which it proceeds, and having so seen it, will be sorry, in order to correct myself in future. If the event has been satisfactory, I will give thanks to God Our Lord and will do in like manner another time.

This Addition is only the application to prayer of one of St. Ignatius's general principles: that of making an examination after every important action, no matter of what nature, so as to make any necessary correction.[1]

The examination following prayer lasts fifteen minutes during the retreat only, when the soul's only occupation is that of devoting itself to holy matters. We have already seen [2] how this quarter of an hour should be spent.

[1] *Sentences*, 9° sentence.

[2] Part 2, ch. 29,

At other times, the rule of most communities does not prescribe any examen after meditation. So this want must be supplied either in the General Examen or by any other method, more detailed and in consequence more effective, which zeal for progress in prayer may suggest. The important point is fidelity in making the examen seriously, for this is the only means of advancing in the heavenly science of prayer and of gaining, little by little, the knowledge of how to hold converse with God.

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Manumigny, René de

Practice of mental prayer

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